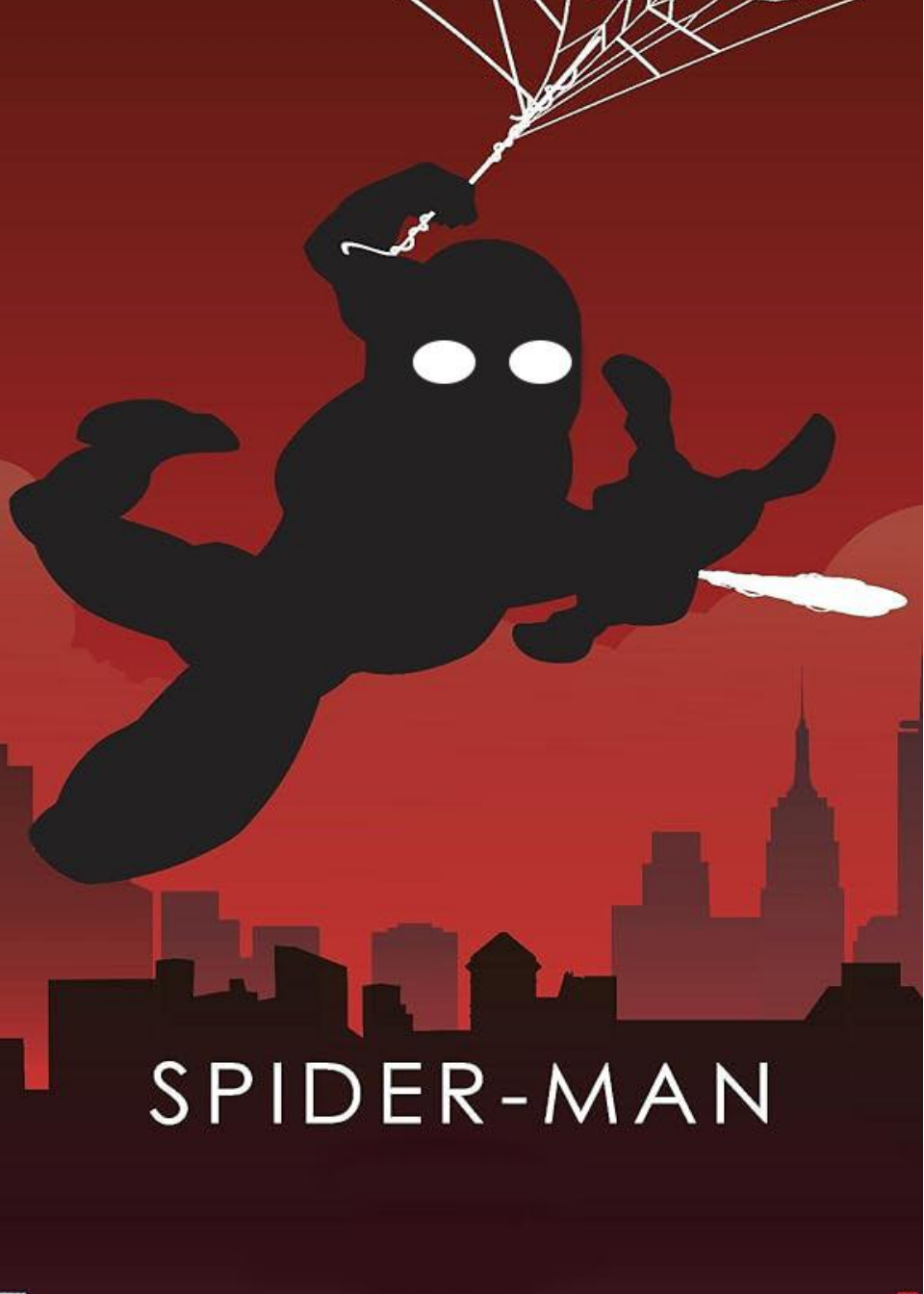
SPIDER-MAN

Amirreza Mahdiyan

Spider-Man

The first webs.

By Amirreza Mahdiyan

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In the Spider's Shadow

"New York City. City of Opportunities," Adam thought, watching the blur of lights and towering buildings outside the taxi window. "Well, I guess in the end, everywhere is the same, just with different colors."

The streets were alive with noise: car horns blaring, street vendors shouting, and conversations bleeding into one another. Adam adjusted his seat, his fingers tracing the frayed edge of his jacket. At least the job at NexGen Bioworks was enough to pay the rent, for now. "It could be worse," he muttered under his breath.

The taxi cut through the chaos, weaving between yellow cabs and delivery trucks. Adam's mind drifted back to the endless mopping and scrubbing awaiting him.

Scientists left more messes than he'd imagined, chemical spills, shattered glass, and God knows what else. Still, it was a paycheck.

"We arrived, sir."

Adam was lost in thoughts.

"Sir!" the driver repeated, his tone rising with irritation.

Adam snapped back to the present. "Yes, thank you." He fumbled with his wallet. "How much?"

"Thirty bucks."

Adam grimaced but handed over the cash. The bills felt too thin in his hand. "Here you go."

As he stepped out, a cold breeze cut through the street. He muttered under his breath, "If this keeps up, I'll need a second job, or just start walking here. Either way, I'm going bankrupt."

The entrance to NexGen Bioworks loomed ahead, a sleek, glass-paneled building that gleamed under the streetlights. It was a fortress of innovation, sealed tight against the chaos of the city. Adam approached the security booth and swiped his janitor card.

The guard, a burly man with a bored expression, barely glanced up. "Evening," he muttered.

"Evening," Adam replied with a nod, slipping past the checkpoint.

Inside, the air changed, sterile and cool, tinged with the faint scent of cleaning agents. The polished floors gleamed under harsh fluorescent lights. Adam exhaled slowly. The noise of the city faded behind the thick glass doors, replaced by the hum of machinery.

He pulled his jacket tighter around himself, the weight of the night shift settling in his bones. It was just another

night cleaning up other people's messes. But tonight would be different, though Adam didn't know it yet.

Adam entered the changing room, the flickering fluorescent light casting pale shadows across the tiled walls. He slid his janitor card through the locker panel, hearing the faint click as the door released. Inside, a pair of gloves, safety goggles, and an apron hung neatly. He suited up with mechanical precision, tying the apron tightly around his waist.

Grabbing the carpet sweeper, he exhaled sharply and made his way toward Sector C, Room 7, the lab notorious for chaos. Scientists worked there late into the night, their experiments leaving a trail of shattered glass, sticky substances, and discarded equipment. Adam had been cleaning it for a week now, and curiosity gnawed at him.

"What are they working on in there?" he wondered, pushing through the wide hallway with gleaming walls that smelled faintly of disinfectant and ozone.

The automatic door to Room 7 hissed open. The air inside was heavy with a chemical tang. Yellow goo splattered across the floor and countertops, remnants of some experiment gone wrong. Adam muttered under his breath as he began sweeping the mess into a collection bin.

Time dragged on, the rhythmic scrape of the sweeper against the floor filling the room. Nearly an hour had passed when a shrill, piercing alarm shattered the monotony.

Adam froze. Red lights strobed across the walls. Every automatic door hissed open simultaneously, the sound echoing like a chorus of metal whispers. His heart raced as he turned toward the far end of

the room, the previously locked door now stood ajar.

"What the hell?" he whispered, instinctively backing toward the nearest counter.

Curiosity battled with caution, but curiosity won. He set the sweeper down and approached the door, his pulse hammering in his ears. The room beyond was dimly lit, filled with rows of glass boxes and a single large glass cage at the center. Strange shadows flickered across the walls as machinery hummed faintly.

Adam's breath caught when he saw it, a spider, suspended inside the cage. Its exoskeleton gleamed under the faint light, dark and iridescent. Its legs twitched with eerie precision.

A mix of terror and awe gripped him. He'd never seen anything like it before.

"What kind of freak show is this?" he muttered, stepping closer despite the chill running down his spine.

Before he could process the scene further, a sudden explosion ripped through the room. Sparks showered from the fuse box near the wall, and the shockwave threw Adam backward.

His body slammed against the cold floor. Pain shot through his ribs, and his vision blurred. Ears ringing, he forced himself to move, muscles screaming in protest. The room was a chaos of smoke and flickering lights. The cage, it was shattered.

The spider was gone.

Adam's stomach twisted. He didn't wait to find out more. With desperate, uneven steps, he staggered toward the nearest exit. His eyes caught a flickering red neon sign above a reinforced door: EMERGENCY EXIT.

Teeth gritted against the pain, he pushed forward, adrenaline the only thing keeping him upright.

Adam flung the door open and spotted a dimly lit staircase spiraling downward. Without thinking, he rushed down, his footsteps echoing off the metal steps. Sweat clung to his forehead, and his lungs burned from the acrid smoke wafting through the building.

At the bottom, a narrow hallway stretched out before him. A group of janitors clustered near a grid door, their faces tense. The door panel beside it flashed red, unresponsive.

"What's going on?" Adam asked, wiping sweat from his brow.

"The damn panel's stuck," one of the janitors said, frustration thick in his voice. "We can't get it to open."

"Let me see," Adam said, shoving past them. He crouched by the panel, fingers

moving instinctively across the buttons. Nothing.

His eyes scanned the room until he spotted a rusted manual lever mounted on the wall.

"There!" Adam shouted, heart racing. He sprinted toward it and gripped the lever. "Help me out!"

The other janitors scrambled to his side. Together, they pulled with all their strength. The lever groaned, resisting, but finally gave way with a heavy clunk.

The lock disengaged.

The grid door creaked open, and the janitors poured through, desperate for escape. Adam followed behind them, the heat at his back urging him forward. Relief flickered in his chest, until a sharp, piercing scream cut through the chaos.

He froze.

His instinct screamed to run, to save himself, but the sound of that voice anchored him in place. A woman was trapped somewhere inside.

Gritting his teeth, Adam turned and sprinted toward the source of the scream.

"Where are you?" he shouted, his voice hoarse.

"I'm here!" she cried.

Adam skidded to a halt, his eyes locking onto a woman pinned beneath a collapsed iron shelf. The heavy structure had crumpled like paper during the explosion, trapping her legs. Her face was twisted in agony.

"Please," she whimpered, "don't leave me here."

Adrenaline surged through Adam's veins. He gripped the edge of the shelf and

pulled, muscles straining. It wouldn't budge. His breath came in ragged gasps.

"You can do this," he told himself, though doubt clawed at his resolve.

Summoning every ounce of strength, Adam planted his feet and lifted again. Pain seared through his arms, burning deep into his muscles and even his bones. His vision blurred, but he refused to let go. With a guttural cry, he heaved the shelf upward just enough to free her legs.

"Come on," he grunted, sliding his arm beneath her back and legs.

She clung to him as he carried her toward the exit, his legs threatening to buckle under the weight. Flames licked at the walls, and the air was thick with smoke. Each step felt like a mile.

Finally, they burst through the emergency exit and into the open night. Fresh air hit Adam's lungs like ice. Behind

him, the building erupted in a deafening explosion, fireballs shooting into the sky.

Firefighters and ambulance crews were already on the scene. People cheered as Adam staggered forward, the woman still cradled in his arms. His legs gave out, and he sank to his knees, gasping for breath.

Paramedics rushed to the woman's side, checking her condition. One gave Adam a nod of gratitude.

"You saved her, man," a firefighter said, clapping him on the shoulder.

Adam barely registered the words. Pain flared in his right arm, sharp and searing. He winced, biting back a scream. Lifting his sleeve, he saw that his forearm was red, swollen, and pulsing with heat.

"What the hell?" he whispered, bewildered.

Before he could process it, a young woman approached him. She had sharp brown eyes and hair pulled into a messy ponytail. Her expression was a mixture of concern and curiosity.

"You okay?" she asked, her voice steady despite the chaos around them.

"Well, I've been better," Adam said with a weak smile, trying to mask the pain radiating through his arm. He let out a soft chuckle, though it lacked conviction.

"Glad to hear you're still standing then," the young woman said with a faint grin. "Emily White, journalist with New York Report." She extended her hand.

Adam hesitated. His instincts urged him to avoid unnecessary attention, but he reluctantly shook her hand. "Adam Malik," he responded.

"Good to meet you, Mr. Malik." Her tone turned more professional. "I have some

questions," She grabbed her camera and adjusted the settings.

Before she could finish, Adam's head spun. A wave of dizziness hit him hard, and his vision blurred. He stumbled, barely keeping himself upright.

"Whoa! Are you alright?" Emily asked, concern flashing in her brown eyes. "Should I call the paramedics?"

"No," Adam said, forcing the word out. His voice was strained and unconvincing. "I just... need some rest."

Emily frowned, clearly unconvinced, but before she could press further, Adam turned and pushed through the crowd.

His steps were unsteady as he moved past firefighters, curious onlookers, and paramedics. Each breath was labored, and pain gnawed at his arm. His muscles trembled with fatigue, but he forced himself forward, driven by the need to escape the chaos.

The cold night air stung his face as he weaved through the streets. He barely remembered the walk home, his surroundings blurring into indistinct shapes.

At last, he reached the worn, graffiti-streaked building that housed his apartment. He fumbled with his keys, his hands shaking, before unlocking the door. The hallway smelled faintly of mildew and stale cooking oil, but it was familiar, his sanctuary from the outside world.

Inside his unit, the cramped space greeted him: a single bed pressed against the wall, a chipped table, and a flickering lamp. Adam staggered toward the bed, his legs threatening to give out. His body trembled violently as he collapsed onto the mattress.

The room spun, and darkness clawed at the edges of his vision. His last coherent

thought was of the spider and the strange, burning pain in his arm.

Then everything went black.

The Hero of New York?

The afternoon light streamed through the window, casting long golden beams across the room. It warmed the cramped space, but Adam stood frozen, his breath shallow.

Before him loomed a giant spider, its iridescent body glinting in the strange light. Its legs twitched with unsettling precision.

"Adapt or die!" a distorted voice echoed through the room, vibrating in Adam's chest.

"The choice is yours."

The spider lunged—

Suddenly, everything dissolved into swirling fragments, replaced by a familiar scene from his past. His father

stood at the edge of a rocky trail, the landscape of their homeland stretching endlessly beyond. The air smelled of sun-warmed earth and wildflowers. Adam was a teenager again, sweaty and breathless from their hike.

"It's about choices, son," his father said, his voice steady and warm. "Whatever choice you make won't just affect you. Remember that."

The words hung in the air, heavy with meaning.

"Now wake up!"

Adam jolted upright, gasping for air. His body was drenched in sweat, and his heart pounded against his ribs. His hand instinctively clutched his chest as he tried to steady his breathing.

"Dad," he muttered, the remnants of the dream clinging to his thoughts. "What was all that about? What choices?"

He rubbed his face, trying to shake off the strange fog. "Must be hallucinating... it's gotta be that damn spider bite," he whispered to himself.

His arm throbbed with a dull, persistent ache. The skin was swollen and red, heat radiating from the wound. He grimaced and grabbed his phone from the nightstand.

"Swollen, red, irritating spider bite," he muttered as he typed. The search results loaded slowly, the screen glowing in the dim room.

Most of the results were generic: *Apply ice. Seek medical attention if symptoms worsen.*

Adam's eyes skimmed the page, but something caught his attention—a forum post buried near the bottom.

Adam clicked on the link. The post was nearly a year old.

Has anyone heard about genetically modified spiders being developed for research? Could they be dangerous if they escaped?

He scrolled down to a single reply from another user:
"They're creating Spider-Man XD."

Adam's breath hitched. "Spider-Man, huh?" he muttered. "That superhero from comics?"

He frowned. "But that's just a story. Pure fiction."

With a sigh, he closed the browser and tossed the phone onto his bed.

"I think I should buy some antihistamines," he muttered, rubbing the sore spot on his arm. "Maybe it'll help."

Glancing at the clock on the wall, his eyes widened. "Three p.m.? What? I slept that long?"

Still groggy, Adam grabbed his jacket and hurried out of the apartment, the echo of the bizarre dream lingering in the back of his mind.

The pharmacy smelled faintly of menthol and rubbing alcohol. Behind the counter stood an old man with thin white hair and kind eyes.

"Looking for something specific, young man?" the pharmacist asked.

Adam approached the counter, rubbing his arm. "I need an antihistamine cream for an insect bite."

The old man nodded, shuffling to a shelf. "Nasty weather for bugs this time of year," he remarked, placing the cream on the counter.

Adam paid, pocketing the cream. "Thanks."

"Take care, son."

Outside, the city buzzed with its usual chaos, honking horns, distant chatter, and the occasional bark of street vendors hawking their wares. Adam muttered to himself, "This will fix it," as he walked toward his apartment.

But then he froze.

A scream cut through the noise, not just any scream, but a desperate, piercing cry that seemed impossibly far away, yet he felt it as if it were right next to him. His senses prickled, guiding him toward the sound.

"What's this feeling?" he whispered, his feet already moving.

Crossing through several alleys, Adam's senses led him to a narrow, deserted passageway. At the far end, three figures stood in sharp contrast to the dim surroundings. Two men loomed over a young woman pressed against the grimy wall.

"Get away from me!" she hissed, her voice shaking.

"Come on," one of the men sneered, an evil grin spreading across his face. "We're just having a little fun."

Their intentions were unmistakable.

Adam's chest tightened with anger. Before he realized what he was doing, he sprinted toward them. His voice cut through the alleyway:

"Stay away from her."

The men turned, their expressions hardening.

"Well, look at this," the taller one jeered. "Little boy playing hero." He took a threatening step forward. "Get outta here before you get hurt."

The woman's eyes widened in relief at the sight of Adam, though fear still clung to her features.

"I'm not going to say it again," Adam warned, his voice steady. "Leave. Now."

The shorter man with a scar across his cheek let out a laugh and nudged his friend. "Let's teach this kid a lesson."

Scarface stepped forward, raising his fist. Time seemed to slow. Adam saw the punch coming, clear as day, every tense muscle, the arc of the swing. Instinct kicked in. He leaned back effortlessly, dodging the punch by a hair.

"What the...? You playin' with me, kid?" the man barked.

Scarface threw another punch, but Adam was faster. He ducked under it and drove his fist into the man's face. The impact sent Scarface flying backward, the sickening crack of his jaw echoing in the alley.

The woman screamed as the second harasser pulled a blade from his jacket, the metal glinting in the dim light.

He lunged.

Adam's body moved before his mind registered the threat. He pivoted and slammed his foot into the man's groin. The harasser crumpled, gasping in pain, before being thrown backward into a pile of trash bags.

Both men scrambled to their feet, faces contorted with pain and fear. Without a word, they turned and ran, their shouts fading into the distance.

Silence fell over the alley.

The woman stared at Adam, her expression shifting from shock to disbelief.

"Emily?" Adam's voice trembled. He hadn't recognized her until now.

Her face lit up with astonishment. "Adam! Is that you?" she shouted with joy.

Adam's heart pounded as he struggled to process what had just happened. His fists still tingled from the force of the punch, but one thing was clear, this wasn't normal.

"I didn't know you were an expert in martial arts," Emily said, a smile of relief spreading across her face.

Adam chuckled, shaking his head. "And I didn't know you had a knack for getting into trouble."

"Hey, it's not my fault," she said playfully. "Trouble just finds me."

Adam smirked. "Sounds like an excuse."

Emily's expression softened. "So... you disappeared yesterday. Didn't answer my questions either."

"Yeah, about that," Adam admitted, rubbing the back of his neck. "That whole incident was a bit... a lot, honestly.

I just needed to rest. Sorry if I came off rude."

"It's okay." She shrugged. "You saved me. I guess we're even now."

Adam smiled. "Even? I dunno, I think I earned a pass from more interviews."

"Don't be so sure. I still need my story," she teased.

Adam laughed. "Now I'm getting the urge to escape again."

They both shared a laugh, the tension from the alley fading.

"Let me walk you home," Adam offered.

"I can go myself."

"Don't argue with me. I'm walking you home."

Emily raised an eyebrow. "Wow, you're more stubborn than I thought."

They started down the street, their footsteps in sync. The buzz of the city hummed around them, cars passing, the occasional shout from a street vendor, but the moment felt strangely calm.

"So, what's your story, Adam?" Emily asked, curiosity lighting up her voice.

He hesitated for a second, then sighed. "Not much to tell. I arrived in New York a few months ago. Thought things would be easier here, but... let's just say it didn't go as planned."

"That's the city for you," Emily said sympathetically.

"I found a job at NexGen Bioworks as a janitor," Adam continued, "but looks like I lost that too." He forced a laugh, though it came out bitter.

"I'm sorry to hear that," Emily said earnestly. After a beat, her face brightened. "Hey, The New York Report is looking for freelance photographers. If

you can handle a camera, you should come by. I'll even vouch for you."

She let out a small laugh, trying to lighten the mood.

Adam blinked, surprised by the offer. "Thanks. I'll think about it."

After walking for some time, they finally reached Emily's home, a modest four-story apartment tucked between larger apartment complexes. She stopped at the steps and turned to Adam.

"This is my place. Thanks for walking me home."

"My pleasure," Adam said, though his voice wavered slightly. He hesitated, scratching his palm nervously. "Uh... maybe we can still stay in touch?"

Emily tilted her head, noticing his blush. A playful smile tugged at her lips. "Yeah, sure. Here," She pulled out her phone and showed him her Instagram handle.

"Thanks," Adam said, quickly saving it. "Take care, and, uh, try not to get into trouble."

"I'll try," she said with a laugh. Her eyes lingered on him for a moment before she turned toward the steps.

As she walked up, Adam stood there for a beat, his chest warm from the interaction.

"Goodnight, Adam!" she called over her shoulder with a smile.

"Goodnight, Emily."

They parted ways, the city buzzing around them, but Adam couldn't shake the feeling that his life had taken a sharp turn.

On his way home, Adam's thoughts drifted to his hands. They felt... different. Warmer, tingling with an odd energy. He flexed his fingers as if trying to shake off the sensation, but it only intensified.

Instead of heading to the alley leading to his apartment, he veered off into an empty, shadowed side street. The buildings loomed above him, their walls weathered and marked with graffiti. The hum of the city faded, leaving only the sound of his breath and the faint rustle of distant traffic.

Adam stopped and stared at his palms, his brow furrowing. "What's happening to me?" he whispered.

Driven by instinct, he reached out and pressed one hand against the brick wall. A strange sensation coursed through his fingers, his skin adhered to the rough surface, almost as if fused with it.

His heart raced.

He placed his other hand on the wall, then tentatively lifted one foot, then the other. Before he knew it, his body was defying gravity, clinging to the wall like it was the most natural thing in the world.

"What the..." Adam muttered, his face a mix of confusion and fear.

Muscles tensed, he slowly climbed upward, his breath shallow with disbelief. Brick by brick, he ascended until his fingers curled over the edge of the rooftop. With a final pull, he hoisted himself up and collapsed onto the flat surface.

For a moment, he sat there, his chest heaving as he stared down at the street below. The people looked tiny, oblivious to the fact that a janitor had just scaled a building like something out of a comic book.

"Maybe I am becoming Spider-Man," he whispered, half in disbelief, half in awe.

The thought lingered as he stood, his eyes locking onto the neighboring building. It was separated by a wide gap, a distance no normal human could jump.

But Adam wasn't feeling normal. Not anymore.

He took a deep breath, muscles coiling with tension. "Alright," he muttered to himself. "Let's see if this is real."

He walked backward, his heart pounding in his chest. Then, with every ounce of strength, he sprinted toward the edge. The wind rushed past his ears as his legs tensed.

And he jumped.

The world slowed for a moment. The street below yawned wide, a deadly abyss waiting to swallow him.

His foot slammed onto the edge of the next rooftop. Pain shot through his ankle, but his body absorbed most of the impact. His hands scraped the rough surface as he caught himself.

Adam knelt there, heart hammering, ankle throbbing slightly. He stared at the

rooftop beneath him, disbelief swirling in his mind.

A fall like that should've shattered bones, yet here he was, shaken but intact.

He let out a breathless laugh, more shock than joy. "I'm Spiderman!" he whispered.

The city skyline stretched before him, and for the first time, Adam saw it differently, not as a labyrinth of obstacles but as a playground waiting to be conquered.

Adrenaline surged through Adam's veins as he sprinted toward the next edge. Without hesitation, he launched himself into the air, clearing the gap effortlessly.

A burst of laughter escaped his lips, wild, uncontrollable joy. The city blurred around him as he leaped from rooftop to rooftop, each successful jump feeding his growing confidence.

"This is insane!" he shouted, his voice echoing against the buildings.

The wind whipped past him, carrying his exhilaration skyward. He was untouchable, unstoppable, until he wasn't.

Adam spotted a much wider gap ahead but didn't slow down. Fueled by adrenaline, he sprinted toward the edge and leaped with all his might.

The instant his feet left the rooftop, reality hit him.

"No, no, no—"

The distance was too far. His arms flailed as the edge of the neighboring building rushed toward him. He stretched out his hands, fingers grazing the ledge—

But he couldn't catch it.

Gravity yanked him downward.

"Oh crap!" he shouted as he plummeted, his voice cracking with terror.

With a bone, jarring crash, he landed in a pile of trash bags. The impact knocked the wind out of him, and the stench of rotting food filled his nostrils.

Groaning, Adam rolled onto his side. "My back... oh, my back," he muttered, wincing as he pressed his hand to his spine.

He sat up slowly, grimacing at the pain. "I definitely overestimated myself," he grumbled.

The exhilaration was gone, replaced by a bruised ego and a growing realization: superpowers or not, he still had a lot to learn.

Adam unlocked the door and pushed it open, the familiar creak echoing through the small apartment. He stepped inside, closing it behind him, and collapsed onto the mattress with a heavy sigh.

"I'm already feeling better," he muttered, stretching his sore back. "Thought I broke a bone or two."

His phone buzzed in his pocket. Adam pulled it out, thumb hovering over the screen. Without thinking too much, he opened Instagram and searched her profile, Emily White. Her account popped up instantly.

He clicked the follow button.

A few seconds later, his phone vibrated. *Request accepted.*

Then another notification followed: *Emily White requested to follow you.*

Adam's heart skipped at the sight. He hesitated for a moment, fingers hovering over the screen, but finally clicked *Accept.*

He stared at the blank message box, nerves kicking in. *Come on, it's just a message,* he told himself.

Hey, he typed and hit send before he could overthink it.

Her response came a moment later: *Hey, just saw you followed me. Let's catch up soon.*

Yeah, for sure. Talk later, Adam replied.

He set the phone down, a faint smile tugging at his lips. Despite everything that had happened, a simple conversation made the day feel a little lighter.

Adam rolled up his sleeve to check the bite on his arm. The swelling and redness had faded, but the bite mark remained, a dark bruise surrounded by faint black veins that spidered outward under his skin. They looked ominous, as if they'd settled there for good.

He frowned but brushed it off. "Not my biggest problem right now," he muttered.

His thoughts drifted elsewhere. "So... Spider-Man uses web shooters with some high-tech web fluid." His brow furrowed. "If I want to be a proper Spider-Man, I need one too. But where the hell am I gonna find that tech?"

His lips pressed into a thin line. "Never mind this. I can't even pay rent if I don't find a job soon."

The thought hit harder than any rooftop jump. Adam sighed and paced. "Maybe I should check out The New York Report," he muttered, recalling Emily's suggestion. After a moment of consideration, he decided to go in the morning.

The sun rose, painting the room in warm hues. Adam stirred as his phone's alarm buzzed aggressively. He slapped it off and sat up groggily, running a hand through his messy hair.

Quickly throwing on blue slacks and a red hoodie, he grabbed a granola bar for the road. As he approached the door, he

paused, his gaze flickering to the window.

A bold idea crept into his mind.

A grin tugged at his lips. "Why not?"

He flung the window open and leaped out onto the rooftop, his landing smooth and steady. The cool morning air filled his lungs.

Adam sprinted forward, adrenaline kicking in as he bounded from rooftop to rooftop. The city below buzzed with life, cars honking, people rushing to work, but the rooftops were his domain.

Pedestrians began to notice. Faces turned skyward, eyes widening in disbelief. Some pointed; others scrambled for their phones.

"Yo! Is that a parkour guy or something?" a voice echoed from below.

"Get a video!" someone shouted.

Phones snapped up, cameras clicking furiously. Adam ignored them, his focus razor-sharp as he cleared another gap. The exhilaration coursed through his veins.

Adam stopped on the rooftop, panting slightly from the run. He pulled out his phone and opened Google Maps, squinting at the screen to check if he was heading in the right direction.

But that strange sense prickled at the back of his head again.

He tensed, eyes scanning the street below. Near a graffiti-covered wall, three bikers surrounded an old man who clutched a worn leather bag to his chest. Their voices were low but menacing, and Adam caught fragments of the threat.

"Give us the bag, old man, or you're gonna regret it."

The man shook his head, trembling. "Please, it's just my groceries—"

Adam's fists clenched. His instincts screamed to help, but common sense urged him to stay out of it. *If I jump in, I'll only draw more attention.*

Then an idea struck him.

He climbed down the side of the building as silently as a shadow, fingers and toes gripping the brick like it was second nature. Reaching a window with iron bars, he carefully wedged his phone between the bars, angling it to record the scene below.

Satisfied with the setup, Adam dropped down into the alleyway, landing smoothly. He pulled up the hood of his red hoodie, concealing his face.

Time to make an entrance.

"Leave the man alone, or else!" he shouted, voice loud and theatrical.

The bikers froze, turning toward him. One of them, a bulky guy with a shaved head, sneered. "Who the hell are you?"

Adam straightened his stance, tilting his head. "The hero of New York," he declared, trying not to cringe at his own words.

The bikers burst out laughing. "Hero, huh?" the leader barked. "You're about to be a dead hero."

The first biker strode toward Adam, raising a fist covered in brass knuckles. His punch was fast, but Adam was faster.

In one swift motion, Adam caught the biker's arm, twisting it painfully. The man grunted in agony, and with a sharp shove, Adam sent him stumbling backward onto the pavement.

The other two bikers exchanged shocked glances before snarling. One grabbed a rusty metal pipe from a pile of trash,

while the other snatched a wooden plank.

"You're gonna regret it, punk!"

They lunged at him simultaneously.

Adam raised both arms in a defensive stance as the bikers charged.

The first blow came hard, a rusted metal pipe smashing against his right arm. Pain exploded through his body, and a sickening crack echoed in his ears. Before he could react, the wooden plank struck his left arm, sending another wave of agony shooting through him.

Adrenaline drowned out hesitation. Teeth gritted, Adam kicked the first attacker square in the face, sending him sprawling to the ground. The second biker lunged again, but Adam spun and delivered a double kick to his chest, knocking the air out of him. The man collapsed with a groan.

Breathing heavily, Adam stood over them, muscles trembling. The alley was silent except for his ragged breath.

The old man cautiously approached, his face a mix of shock and gratitude. "You have potential, kid," he said, his voice earnest. "Don't waste it."

Adam's chest tightened at the words. He nodded silently, watching the man walk away.

Once the alley cleared, Adam climbed back up to the rooftop and retrieved his phone. He checked the footage, a faint smile tugging at his lips.

"This has gotta impress the people at The New York Report," he muttered.

But the dull, throbbing pain in his arms reminded him of his inexperience. He glanced at the dark bruises forming beneath his sleeves and winced. "I really need to learn martial arts," he whispered.

"I don't even know how to defend myself, and it hurts badly."

Sitting on the edge of the rooftop, Adam opened his phone and typed a message to Emily.

Good morning, Emily. I'm thinking about checking out that job at The New York Report. You said you'd vouch for me, right ;3

He was about to put the phone away when a notification pinged.

Good morning! I'm already here. See you soon! **Emily had responded with a laugh emoji.**

Adam grinned despite the pain. "Guess it's happening," he muttered, slipping the phone back into his pocket.

He returned to his apartment, moving carefully to avoid worsening his injuries. He quickly changed out of his rooftop, hopping attire, swapping it for

something more casual to avoid suspicion.

The mirror reflected the faint veins around the bite mark and slight bruises, but he ignored it.

Without wasting time, he headed back out toward The New York Report.

The New York Report building was tall, blending seamlessly with the other glass and steel giants of New York City. Adam entered the bustling lobby, nerves knotting his stomach. After checking the directory, he stepped into the elevator and pressed the button for the floor marked "Editorial Office."

When the elevator doors slid open, he walked out, and immediately collided with someone.

"Oops, sorry," Adam said, stepping back.

"No, no, my fault," Emily replied, an embarrassed smile on her face. "I wasn't paying attention."

Adam smiled nervously. "Guess this place is busier than I expected."

She tilted her head. "So, you're serious about this? Becoming a photographer?"

"I hope so," he admitted. "I just don't know if I'm cut out for this kind of job."

"Don't worry," Emily said reassuringly. "Let's head into the manager's office together. I'll introduce you."

"That'd be perfect. Thanks," Adam replied, the tension in his chest easing.

As they approached the door, Emily stopped him with a hand on his arm. "Just a heads up, inside is Randolph 'Randy' Rourke. He's... intense. Try to stay on his good side."

Adam nodded. "Got it."

Emily knocked once before pushing the door open. Inside, Randolph "Randy" Rourke sat behind a desk piled high with papers and folders. His steely eyes first darted to Emily, then to Adam.

"Mrs. White," Rourke said in his usual curt tone. "I hope you've either got a good story or a damn good reason for interrupting me. I'm busy."

Emily offered a polite smile. "I've got good reason, Mr. Rourke. You're looking for a freelance photographer, right? Well, here's one for you."

Adam stepped forward, swallowing his nerves. "Uh, hello, Mr. Rourke. I'm Adam Malik."

He extended his hand for a handshake, wincing slightly from the lingering pain in his arm. Rourke glanced at his hand but didn't take it, instead folding his arms across his chest.

"So, Mrs. White," Rourke said, his cold eyes shifting back to Emily, "since you're apparently the authority here, what makes you think this guy is worth my time?"

Before Emily could respond, Adam straightened his posture. "I'd rather not tell you, I'll just show you," he said, pulling out his phone.

Rourke raised an eyebrow as Adam swiped through his photos and video footage, presenting shots of the alley confrontation and rooftop views of the city.

Rourke leaned closer, his expression softening, just slightly. "Well, well," he muttered, his eyes lighting up with interest. "Finally, someone brings me something worth my time."

He looked back at Adam, his tone brisk. "You're in. Send those photos and videos to my assistant, and here's a hundred

bucks to start. Now, unless you've got something else, get out of my office."

Adam nodded quickly, accepting the cash. "Thank you, Mr. Rourke. I won't let you down."

Rourke waved a dismissive hand, already turning back to his mountain of papers.

Adam left the room with Emily trailing behind him. The tension in the hallway was noticeably lighter.

"That went well," Emily said, still slightly surprised.

"Yeah, it did," Adam replied, exhaling a breath he hadn't realized he'd been holding. "Thanks for being there. He's got... a personality, doesn't he?"

Emily laughed. "Oh, you have no idea. But hey, we're partners now," she said playfully, nudging him with her shoulder.

Adam smiled. "Guess we are."

"So... how did you stumble upon the scene?" Emily asked with a teasing smile. Her tone was light, but her eyes gleamed with curiosity. "It was you, wasn't it? The way you saved me before and now this 'Hero of New York' video..."

Adam's chest tightened. "No," he said quickly, cutting her off. "It was definitely not me."

Emily raised an eyebrow.

"Didn't you see how professional that guy was?" Adam added, forcing a chuckle. "I can barely walk down the street without tripping over something. That dude? Total expert."

"Ahah," Emily replied, her voice dripping with sarcasm. "Whatever you say."

The air between them thickened with playful tension. Adam fought the urge to fidget under her gaze.

After a brief silence, Emily's expression softened. "Now that we're partners, maybe we can work on some future stories together."

Adam blinked, caught off guard.

"Here," she said, pulling out her phone. "Take my number."

His eyes widened, but he masked it quickly and saved her contact. "Thanks. I'll, uh... definitely keep that in mind."

Emily smiled. "Alright, I have a few things to take care of. I'll call you."

"Sure. See you soon, I guess."

"See you soon," she said with a wave before walking off.

As she disappeared down the hallway, Adam let out a slow breath, his heart still racing. *That was close.*

The Hunt Begins

Adam sat on his mattress, his back against the wall, phone pressed to his ear. His voice was low, tinged with frustration.

"I know, brother, but some things went down at work, and I can't pay this month's rent," Adam said, trying to keep his tone steady. "Would you, just this once, spot me the rent? I swear I'll pay you back."

There was a pause on the other end.

"Adam." His brother's voice was flat. "I know you're not gonna pay it back. But still, I don't want a homeless and idiot brother. I'll give you $800, maybe that way you'll stay just an idiot and not homeless."

Adam let out a relieved breath. "Thank you so much. You're a lifesaver."

"Yeah, yeah." His brother sighed. "I'm at work. Bit busy. Talk to you later?"

"Yeah, sure. Bye."

The call ended, but the weight of Adam's situation lingered. He stared at the cracked paint on the ceiling, frustration gnawing at him. "I need to get some pictures for next month, or I'll be sleeping under some bridge," he muttered.

A sudden notification buzzed on his phone. He grabbed it off the mattress and tapped the screen.

The notification opened to a post from *The New York Report*'s official X channel.

It was his footage, the caption read:

"A Hero or a Fool? Watch the video of a man claiming to be the Hero of New York, fighting three bikers."

Adam's eyes widened. "A hero or a fool?" he muttered. "Who the hell wrote this?"

Curiosity got the better of him, and he scrolled down to the comments:

- *"Staged for clicks. Totally fake."*
- *"#TheHeroOfNYC is wild, but the guy's got moves."*
- *"#IsSpiderManReal? I swear this dude was climbing walls."*

A slight smile tugged at his lips despite himself. Public attention was swirling around him, even if it was half skepticism and half awe.

An idea flickered in his mind. If people wanted a story, he'd give them one, and he'd get the pictures to pay his rent while he was at it.

Adam stood up, heart racing with a mix of adrenaline and determination. He grabbed his outfit: blue slacks, his red hoodie with the hood pulled up, and a black bandana to cover the lower half of his face.

Pulling it snug, he opened the window and leaped onto the nearby rooftop, landing smoothly.

"Let's make some stories for The New York Report," he muttered under his breath before sprinting toward the skyline, the wind biting at his face.

Adam sprinted from rooftop to rooftop, scanning the city below for an opportunity to capture a story-worthy moment. The air was crisp against his face, his breathing steady as adrenaline fueled his every leap.

But then it hit him, that strange tingling sense crawling up his spine. His instincts flared, but this wasn't the familiar pull of someone in distress.

Something's wrong.

Mid-jump, a sudden hiss cut through the air. His eyes widened as he spotted a streak of electrical stun gun bullets arcing toward him.

"Sh...!"

He twisted desperately in the air, narrowly avoiding the projectiles. The movement threw off his landing, and he tumbled hard onto the rooftop, rolling to a stop with a grunt.

From afar, he saw them, three sleek, automated drones hovering ominously in the sky, their targeting systems locked onto him.

"What the hell?" Adam muttered, heart racing.

Another wave of bullets rained down. He ducked and scrambled to avoid them, but one shot angled downward and struck his right leg.

Electricity exploded through his body. His muscles seized up, and pain shot through his leg. Gritting his teeth, Adam forced himself to move, stumbling to his feet. Desperation overtook him as he broke into a full sprint.

The drones were fast, relentless. One zipped ahead, cutting off his escape.

Fueled by instinct, he launched himself at the drone, grabbing onto its metallic frame. The machine whirred and wobbled in midair, trying to shake him off.

Adam clenched his jaw and slammed his fist against it, denting the surface. His eyes caught a faint shutter near the side. He clawed it open, revealing a tangled mess of wires and circuits.

"Gotcha," he whispered, yanking a handful of wires loose.

The drone let out a high-pitched alarm, shuddering violently before spiraling downward.

Without thinking, Adam leaped off just before it hit the ground, only for another drone to slam into him mid-air.

The impact knocked the wind out of him.

But desperation kept him focused. He grabbed onto the drone's body, teeth gritted against the pain in his leg. Climbing atop it, he pried open its casing and tore out more wires. The drone shrieked and plummeted.

One left.

Spotting the third drone, Adam didn't hesitate. He launched himself through the air and landed squarely on top of it. The machine dipped and bucked wildly, but Adam held on.

"Not today," he growled, ripping out its circuits with one final, savage pull.

The drone's engine died, and Adam spotted a nearby street lamp just in time. He reached out and grabbed it, muscles straining as he swung himself up.

Panting heavily, he perched on the lamp, heart pounding in his chest. Below, the shattered remains of the drones littered

the street. Sparks flickered from their broken frames.

Pedestrians began to gather, pointing and murmuring in disbelief. Phones were already out, cameras pointed in their direction.

Panic flared in Adam's chest. *Not good.*

Before the crowd could gather more attention, he jumped to a nearby rooftop and disappeared into the shadows, adrenaline still thrumming through his veins.

Adam stumbled back into his room, slamming the window behind him. His breathing was ragged, and sweat drenched his pale skin. The sting in his leg throbbed with every step, but it was nothing compared to the whirlwind of thoughts in his mind.

"Who the hell sent those drones after me?" he muttered, leaning against the

wall. His fists clenched as realization struck.

"NexGen Bioworks." His voice was a growl, teeth gritting in both pain and fury.

Fear and confusion twisted in his chest. *What do I do now?* He had no backup, no plan, no one to turn to.

But Adam wasn't one to sit idle. Desperation fueled creativity. He grabbed his phone, opened YouTube, and typed: "Life-saving acrobatic moves."

"If I'm going to survive this, I need more than dumb luck," he whispered.

Propping the phone on the rooftop, he hit play. A professional acrobat demonstrated moves with effortless grace. Adam's eyes narrowed with determination.

"Let's see how this goes."

Ignoring the sharp pain in his leg, he mimicked the moves. His first attempts were clumsy, his foot slipped during a front roll, and he nearly toppled during a somersault.

But adrenaline and stubbornness drove him forward.

"I'm learning... actually learning fast," he muttered in disbelief as he nailed a backslide.

He continued, somersaults, Mobius flips, front slides, and even a tricky jumping slide. His body protested with every movement, but he pushed through. His sweat-slicked face dripped onto the floor as he perfected each move with increasing precision.

After hours of relentless practice, Adam returned to his room, collapsing onto his bed, chest heaving. His muscles trembled from exhaustion, but a grim realization settled in:

"I can't just rely on luck. I need an edge if I want to survive."

His mind flickered back to NexGen Bioworks, the endless cleaning shifts, the chemical spills, and the strange experiments he'd scrubbed off the floor. One memory stood out.

Spider silk. Strong, lightweight, and experimental. He had often cleaned stray threads of it from lab floors after tests.

"I need that web." His voice was steady now. "I have to get the blueprint."

But he wasn't naive. Breaking into a high-security lab wasn't a one-man job.

"I need help... and a plan."

Determination flickered in his eyes. Adam knew one thing for sure—he couldn't be reckless anymore. This time, he'd be prepared.

The sun dipped below the horizon, casting long shadows across the neighborhood. Night crept in, the faint hum of traffic echoing in the distance. Perched on top of street lamp in front of Emily's house, Adam adjusted the bandana covering the lower half of his face.

He took out his phone and typed a message:
We need to meet. Back Alley.

A few minutes later, her reply buzzed back:
Alright, but what for?

Adam stared at the screen, his thumb hovering over the keys. He wanted to respond, but couldn't find the words. He let the message hang unanswered.

Moments later, Emily stepped out of her house, her silhouette framed by the porch light. She zipped up her jacket and walked briskly down the sidewalk. Adam followed from above.

He leaped onto the roof of the neighboring apartment building, his footsteps light and soundless. The cool night air bit at his skin as he reached the edge and began crawling down the wall.

The glow of passing car headlights swept across him in fleeting bursts, but darkness swallowed him between flashes.

Emily reached the alley first, looking around. "Hello?" she called out, her voice cautious.

Adam clung to the wall above her, his heart racing. In a low, distorted voice, he called out: "Hey!"

Emily flinched, her eyes darting upward. "Who's there?"

"The Hero of New York City," he replied, still clinging to the wall.

She blinked, then let out a laugh. "What a ridiculous name. Stick to *Spider-Man*,

alright? It suits you better, and people like it more."

Adam huffed but decided not to argue. He dropped down in front of her, landing smoothly.

"Whatever. I need your help," he said, keeping his voice deliberately deep and rough.

Emily crossed her arms, a teasing smile tugging at her lips. "Well, well. Never thought I'd be helping Spider-Man, or even seeing him in real life."

"I asked a... mutual friend to connect me with you," Adam said, coughing slightly to maintain the deep tone. "He said you're resourceful."

Emily's brow lifted. "Did he now?" She clearly understood who the "mutual friend" was but chose not to call him out. "Alright, what do you want?"

Adam's eyes narrowed behind the bandana, determination flickering in his gaze.

"What?" Emily's voice was a mix of shock and disbelief. "You want to break into *NexGen Bioworks* and steal a classified document?"

"Blueprint," Spider-Man corrected, his tone low and steady.

Emily crossed her arms, astonishment giving way to a wry smile. "This is insane. I've been waiting my whole life for an opportunity to expose the corruption in that company, and you want to just sneak in and swipe evidence?"

He remained silent, eyes fixed on her.

She exhaled sharply, the weight of the decision pressing down on her. "Alright. What's your plan?"

Emily approached the lab's main entrance, her heels tapping against the sleek concrete floor. The security guard at the front desk was a middle-aged man with a crew cut and a bored expression. He eyed her with mild suspicion as she approached.

"Can I help you?" the guard asked, his tone flat.

Emily flashed a polite smile and held up her press badge. "Emily White, journalist with The New York Report. I have an exclusive interview scheduled with one of your researchers."

The guard frowned. "I wasn't informed about any journalist visits."

Emily tilted her head, feigning mild annoyance. "That's odd. Dr. Ca... Ahhh"

"Dr. Carrington" guard corrected.

"Yeah right, I forgot these names, he told me everything was cleared with

security." She leaned in slightly. "He's not going to be happy if I miss this interview. You know how scientists can be always on a tight schedule."

The guard hesitated, clearly weighing his options. "I need to double-check with my supervisor."

"Do you, though?" Emily interjected smoothly. "I mean, come on. A guy like you probably has more important things to deal with than babysitting a journalist. Right?"

The flattery worked. The guard puffed out his chest slightly. "Well... yeah. I guess I do."

"Exactly," Emily said, her tone friendly. "I'll be quick, I promise. In and out, no trouble."

After a beat of consideration, the guard reluctantly nodded. "Fine. Just don't wander into restricted areas."

"Of course not," Emily lied effortlessly. "Thanks, you're a lifesaver."

As the guard buzzed her in, Emily stole a quick glance at the rooftop. Spider-Man was barely visible in the shadows, clinging to the building's exterior. Their eyes met briefly, and he nodded before slipping into an open vent.

The cool, metallic air of the ventilation canal brushed against Spider-Man's skin as he crawled through the labyrinthine system. The faint hum of machinery echoed around him.

He pulled out the tablet Emily had borrowed from her tech-savvy contact. The schematic of the lab flickered on the screen, mapping out pathways through the vents and indicating key rooms.

"Research wing... that way," he muttered to himself.

Through the grated strips of the vent, he could see scientists moving below, white lab coats fluttering as they hurried between workstations. Conversations about gene therapy trials and neural enhancements filtered up to him.

Spider-Man crawled forward, muscles tense, navigating the maze-like system with careful precision.

Spider-Man clung to the wall just outside the research hallway. The vent he'd crawled through was now sealed behind him. The hallway stretched before him, clean and brightly lit, but with one major problem.

Red laser beams crisscrossed the space in an intricate grid, humming faintly in the still air. The lasers pulsed at varying heights, blocking any clear path. Spider-Man narrowed his eyes, studying the pattern.

This isn't just security, it's a fortress.

He tensed his muscles, calculating the sequence. The first section had two grids that only left room near the ceiling. Easy enough.

Spider-Man crawled up the wall, positioning himself at the very top. With a practiced leap, he arched over the laser beams, fingers and toes clinging to the smooth surface as he passed through.

His breathing was steady. So far, so good.

But as he moved forward, the pattern changed. Two more lasers now blocked the top and bottom simultaneously, leaving a narrow gap in the middle.

No way around it, he thought grimly.

He crouched on the wall, muscles coiling like a spring. Timing was everything.

With a sharp exhale, he launched himself through the gap, twisting his body mid-

air. His hoodie grazed the beams, but he managed to clear the grid. His feet hit the ground, and he instinctively dropped into a low crawl, skimming under the next set of lasers.

Almost there.

The final obstacle was a vertical column of shifting beams, rotating in a hypnotic pattern. One mistake and he'd be fried.

Spider-Man clenched his jaw. His enhanced reflexes kicked in, and time seemed to slow. He moved swiftly, twisting, ducking, and leaping through the rotating lasers, each move faster and sharper than the last.

Finally, with one last acrobatic roll, he cleared the grid and pressed himself flat against the wall.

His chest heaved as he caught his breath. "Not bad for a guy learning from YouTube," he muttered under his breath.

Ahead, a locked magnetic door stood in his way. The panel next to it glowed with the message: **Magnetic Doors Locked.**

Spider-Man pulled up the tablet and quickly disabled the locks with a few taps. The door slid open, and the lights in the adjacent hallway flickered as all doors in the lab unlocked simultaneously.

"Showtime," he whispered, crawling back up the wall to remain hidden.

Emily walked confidently through the hallway, accompanied by the security guard assigned to tail her. His expression was cautious, as though he knew something was off.

"You really don't have to follow me," Emily said with a light laugh. "I'm just waiting for Dr. Carrington. You probably have more important things to do."

"I'm supposed to make sure you stay in the authorized areas," the guard insisted.

Emily rolled her eyes playfully. "You do realize I'm a journalist, not a spy, right? What am I gonna do, steal lab samples and leak them online?"

The guard frowned, clearly unsure if she was joking. "Still. Rules are rules."

She sighed dramatically, pretending to check her watch. "Fine. But if Dr. Carrington complains about me being late because I was babysat by security, that's on you."

The guard's resolve wavered. "Well... just don't get me in trouble."

"Never," she promised with a sweet smile.

As they passed a hallway, the faint *click* of locks disengaging caught her attention. Doors along the corridor

quietly slid open. *Spider-Man's in position,* she thought.

Emily pretended to receive a phone call, holding her hand to her ear. "Yeah, I'm here," she said loudly, her voice echoing down the hall. "Just waiting on this really slow scientist. Uh-huh. Yeah, I'll be right there."

She stepped toward a shelf filled with glass research samples. With a subtle nudge, she knocked one onto the floor.

The shattering sound echoed loudly through the lab.

"What the...?" The guard's head snapped toward the noise.

"I'm so clumsy!" Emily gasped. "Sorry about that!"

The guards in the nearby room immediately moved to investigate. Seizing the opportunity, Emily slipped into one of the newly unlocked rooms.

The sign above the door read: Level 4 Clearance – Genetic Research Division.

Her heart raced as she quietly closed the door behind her.

As Emily moved through the dimly lit hallway, her footsteps echoed against the cold floor. Her heart raced, but curiosity drove her forward. Doors marked with cryptic codes lined the walls, and through reinforced glass panels, she could see containment chambers.

Most were empty, but one caught her attention, and made her stomach churn.

Inside the chamber were grotesque spider-like creatures, their twisted forms writhing under flickering lights. Their translucent exoskeletons pulsed faintly, and some had appendages malformed as though nature itself had rejected their existence.

"My God... what are these?" she whispered, terror creeping into her voice.

Screens mounted next to the chambers displayed disturbing vitals, heart rates, neural activity, and genetic sequences scrolling rapidly. One screen flickered with a red caption:

Subject #04: Venom Synthesis Causing Neural Degradation

Emily's breath caught in her throat. Her journalistic instincts clashed with the overwhelming horror of the scene.

Further down the hall, another digital display revealed research trials involving human test subjects. Clinical data filled the screen:

- **Subjects:** Classified
- **Procedure:** Neural Mapping via Arachnid Venom Integration
- **Outcome:** Fatal or Irreversible Neural Damage

A sharp beep drew her attention to a nearby monitor. A video played on loop, showing a restrained man thrashing violently as scientists injected a glowing serum into his bloodstream.

On the corner of the footage, the words stood out:

Test Supervisor: Dr. Conrad

Emily's hand trembled as she gripped her phone. Anger and revulsion twisted inside her. "They're monsters," she whispered to herself. "This isn't research, this is torture."

Meanwhile, Spider-Man crept along the walls of the research wing, his movements silent and precise. The tablet Emily had borrowed guided him toward the storage vault.

A large metallic safe stood in the corner of the room, secured with biometric and

passcode locks. The interface blinked: Level 5 Access Required.

Spider-Man crouched by the panel, fingers flying across the tablet's screen. "Come on..." he muttered, bypassing the firewall and disabling the locks.

With a soft click, the safe door hissed open. Inside were neatly stacked files, encrypted drives, a single prototype blueprint and small vial of web fluid encased.

He grabbed the blueprint and vial, slipping it into a small waterproof bag strapped to his waist. "Got it," he whispered.

Near the fuse box, Spider-Man spotted an opportunity. A sly grin formed beneath his mask. He yanked a few wires, triggering a simulated power malfunction. The lights flickered, and warning sirens blared throughout the facility.

Emily's pulse quickened as the lights dimmed. The guards in the nearby observation room scrambled to respond to the apparent malfunction. Seizing the opportunity, she whispered into her phone, "Spider-Man, what's your status?"

"Got the blueprint," he answered in a low voice. "Meet me at the service corridor near the east wing."

"On my way," Emily said, her voice steely with resolve.

As she moved swiftly through the hallway, her eyes darted back to the containment chambers. The grotesque experiments burned into her memory. Her fear had transformed into something sharper, determination.

Spider-Man dropped down from a vent just as Emily reached the meeting point.

"You okay?" he asked, scanning her face.

"I saw what they're doing," she said breathlessly. "We have to stop them, Spider-Man. We can't let them get away with this."

He nodded grimly. "One step at a time. Let's get out first."

They moved in sync, avoiding patrolling guards and security drones. Finally, they reached the emergency exit, slipping into the cool night air. Sirens wailed in the distance, but they were already gone.

"Hey, you look pale," Spider-Man said, concern lacing his voice. "What did you see?"

"Horrors," Emily whispered, still catching her breath. Her voice was shaky, but her eyes burned with determination. "I'm glad I came with you... otherwise I wouldn't have seen what they were doing to innocent people."

She pulled out her phone and showed him photos she had captured. "Look at this."

At the sight of the spider-like creatures on the screen, a chill ran down Spider-Man's spine. His breath hitched as flashes of the burning lab and the enhanced spider that had bitten him flickered in his mind.

"We have to stop them, Spider-Man," Emily said fiercely.

"We will," he promised, though his voice was measured. "When the time comes."

"That's not soon enough," she muttered under her breath.

Spider-Man exhaled and softened his tone. "First, let's just get you home."

They walked through a series of empty alleys, the night enveloping them in a quiet stillness. For a while, neither spoke, footsteps echoing against brick walls.

Finally, Emily broke the silence. "So... how do you know Adam?"

Spider-Man tensed. His mind scrambled for an answer. "Ahhhh..."

Think, think!

"We have an agreement," he said awkwardly. "He's... my photographer."

Emily's eyebrows shot up in surprise. "Your photographer?"

"Yeah. He takes pictures of me for reports. It's... business."

She stared at him for a moment, clearly skeptical, but decided not to press further. "Alright," she said, her tone neutral. "That's... unconventional, but okay."

Spider-Man sighed inwardly, relieved that she hadn't pushed harder. They continued walking, but the tension lingered in the air.

"We're almost there," Spider-Man said as they reached the quieter streets near Emily's apartment.

"I can manage from here. Thanks," Emily replied, her voice steady but thoughtful.

"You sure?"

"Yeah. Thanks... for everything." She hesitated for a beat, then added with a small smirk, "And don't forget, send my regards to our mutual friend."

Spider-Man blinked, caught off guard. For a moment, he searched for a clever response but settled on, "Yeah... I will."

Their eyes met briefly, an unspoken understanding passing between them.

"Good night, Spider-Man," she said softly.

"Good night."

With a final glance, they turned and parted ways, each vanishing into the night, Emily into the glow of streetlights

and Spider-Man back into the shadows of the rooftops.

Into the Web

"So..." Adam muttered, leaning over his cluttered desk, hands on his hips. "How do I make this work?"

The table was covered in scattered electrical components, wires, mechanical parts, and half-empty bottles of adhesive chemicals. His cellphone screen displayed 3D printer schematics. Blueprints and scribbled notes were taped haphazardly to the wall.

"Spent all my savings on that 3D printer and this basic chemical hardener from the hobby store," he muttered. "Better be worth it."

Carefully, Adam measured and diluted a vial of silk-like spider web fluid with the chemical hardener in a glass container. He swirled it gently, watching the mixture turn from cloudy to translucent.

Satisfied, he used a syringe to transfer the fluid into a modified CO2 canister.

Next, he printed the wrist-mounted web shooter case using his 3D printer. The sleek casing had precisely measured slots for each component. "Looking decent," he muttered, eyeing the design.

He assembled the shooter meticulously, connecting a ballpoint pen tip as a makeshift spinneret nozzle. Wires and slim mechanical strides connected a button trigger to the CO2 canister, allowing silk to be ejected when pressed.

"Please don't explode in my face," Adam whispered as he inserted the nozzle into the casing and connected the canister. He carefully added a cheap UV-reactive adhesive he'd bought from a craft store to help the silk harden upon exposure to air.

Clearing the sweat from his forehead, Adam finally strapped the web shooter

to his wrist. The weight was lighter than he expected.

"Okay," he whispered, heart racing. "Moment of truth."

He aimed at an empty soda bottle on the other side of the room. His thumb hovered over the palm-mounted button.

Click.

Nothing.

Adam frowned, pressing the button a few more times. Still nothing. "Come on, work with me," he muttered.

He took a closer look at the nozzle and found the problem: the silk was clogging because it wasn't hardening fast enough. "Great," he grumbled. "Just my luck."

After hours of tweaking the chemical ratio and nozzle adjustments, his room reeked of adhesives and melted plastic. His fingers were sticky, and his patience

was wearing thin. But Adam's resolve held firm.

He reset the canister, aimed at the bottle again, and pressed the button.

A thin stream of web shot from the nozzle, striking the bottle with a satisfying *thwack*.

Adam's jaw dropped. "No way," he whispered, joy bubbling up inside him.

He tugged on the web, and the bottle flew toward him. He caught it in mid-air, grinning ear to ear.

"Yes!" he shouted triumphantly.

But he knew this was just the beginning. The web formula needed more refinement, and he needed to produce more silk fluid efficiently. His gaze shifted to the corner of the room, where he'd set up a makeshift fermentation tank using an aquarium temperature controller.

"If I can cultivate the right bacteria and yeast mix," Adam muttered, "I should be able to produce silk faster and stronger."

He scribbled additional notes on his notepad, already thinking ahead. The thrill of success coursed through him, but so did the weight of what was coming. He had a tool now—but soon, he'd need it for far more than soda bottles.

"Time to test this bad boy," Adam said, grinning with excitement.

He strapped the web-shooter tightly to his wrist, heart racing as he opened the window and crawled up to the rooftop. The cool air brushed against his face as he stood on the edge, looking down at the city streets far below.

"You better not disappoint Daddy," he muttered nervously, glancing at the web-shooter. Despite his confident tone, a flicker of fear danced in his eyes.

He took a deep breath, aimed at the tallest building nearby, and pressed the button.

Thwip!

The web shot out, streaking across the dark sky and adhering firmly to the building's surface. Adam's jaw dropped.

"Oh man... I actually did it!" he whispered, awe-struck.

Without giving himself time to second-guess, he grabbed the web with both hands and jumped off the rooftop.

The wind roared past his ears as the city blurred beneath him. The web held firm, taut under his weight. Adrenaline surged through his veins.

"I'm flying!" Adam shouted, pure joy bursting from his chest.

But his exhilaration was short-lived. A building loomed suddenly in front of him,

its brick façade rushing toward him faster than he could react.

"Oh..."

BAM!

He slammed into the side of the building, limbs flailing. His chest hit first, knocking the wind out of him. Desperately, he clawed at the wall, barely managing to cling to it with both hands.

Panting, Adam pressed his forehead against the bricks. "Okay... note to self: I definitely need a second web-shooter," he muttered breathlessly.

Despite the pain radiating through his ribs, a shaky laugh escaped him. He'd done it. Imperfect, messy, but he'd swung through the city like a Spiderman.

Adam returned to his apartment, but this time, through the staircase and main door like a regular person. His ribs ached

from the crash, but exhilaration still buzzed through him.

He collapsed onto his desk, immediately getting back to work on the second web shooter. "Alright, round two," he muttered, cracking his knuckles.

The room filled with the faint hum of the 3D printer and the clatter of tools as he adjusted components and reconnected wires. Sweat beaded on his forehead as he carefully replicated the modifications from his first build.

An hour later, Adam finally tightened the last screw. He held up the second web shooter triumphantly, the gleam of satisfaction in his eyes. "You're coming to the party," he whispered, strapping it to his other wrist.

Ring, ring!

His phone buzzed on the desk. The screen lit up: *Emily White.*

"Hey, Emily," Adam said, pressing the phone to his ear.

"Hey, Adam!" Her voice was brimming with excitement. "You are not going to believe what happened."

"Sounds important," he said, curiosity piqued.

"Meet me at Lizzy's Diner near Forest Hills."

"Alright, see you there."

"See you," Emily replied, the call ending with a click.

Adam leaned back in his chair, heart still racing from the call. *Well, time to go.*

"Alright, twenty bucks for my meal, plus tax," Adam muttered, staring at his phone's digital wallet. "Emily's probably going to order something decent, call it another twenty-five. That's forty-five bucks total."

He sighed, eyes drifting back to the balance: **seventy-three dollars and fifty cents.** But leaving Emily to pay? No chance.

Adam rubbed the back of his neck. "Guess it's ramen and tap water for the rest of the week," he muttered.

He pulled on his casual clothes, jeans, a simple shirt, and a jacket. They were the only decent clothes he had besides his hoodie and slacks. After strapping on his web shooters, Adam took a breath.

"Alright... now that I'm going out, let's practice swinging."

He crawled out onto the roof, crouching near the edge. The city stretched below, buzzing with life under the fading evening light.

With a steadying breath, Adam jumped.

His right hand shot up, fingers pressing the button on his palm.

Thwip!

The web struck a building and held firm. Adam grabbed it with both hands and swung, his body hurtling forward through the air. Wind whipped past his face, and his heart pounded in his chest.

"Okay... okay... not bad!" he shouted, exhilaration creeping into his voice.

He released the web and shot another with his left hand, the fluid arc striking the next building. His momentum carried him forward as he let go of the previous line. The rhythm was clumsy but improving with each attempt.

His heart raced, fear and excitement mingling in his chest.

He repeated the pattern, swinging through the cityscape until he neared Forest Hills. Spotting an empty alley, he landed with a thud, rolling to absorb the impact.

"Not perfect, but getting there," he muttered, brushing dust from his jacket.

He walked the rest of the way toward Lizzy's Diner, his mind still buzzing from the adrenaline of the swing practice.

As Adam entered the diner, the scent of freshly baked pies and brewed coffee filled the air. His eyes immediately found Emily sitting by a window table, scrolling through her phone.

"Hey, Emily," Adam greeted as he approached her. "You got something exciting to share?"

She looked up, her face lighting up. "Oh, you are *not* going to believe what just happened."

"Really? What happened?" he asked, even though he knew exactly what she was about to say. He slid into the chair across from her.

"Me and Spider-Man... we infiltrated NexGen Lab!" she said, her voice brimming with excitement. "It was wild."

Adam's brow lifted in mock amazement. "No way. Seriously?"

Emily's excitement dimmed briefly as her expression grew somber. "Yeah... but it was also horrible. What I saw in there..." She shook her head.

"Wow. So that's why Spider-Man needed your help and asked me for someone able," Adam said, playing innocent. "How was it? What did you do?"

She launched into an animated retelling of the entire night, from sneaking through security to the unsettling discoveries in the lab.

"Man," Adam said when she finished, shaking his head in admiration. "What an adventure. Wish I was there to see you in action."

"It was like a Hollywood movie," she said, her gaze drifting out the window.

Lizzy, the waitress, approached their table. "What's your order?"

Adam gestured toward Emily. "What do you want?"

"I'll take a slice of cherry pie."

"And you, sir?"

"Tough choice... but I'll go with the apple pie."

"Good choices," Lizzy said with a smile, heading back to the counter.

After she left, Adam leaned forward. "Whatever they're planning at that lab, I know you and Spider-Man will stop them. But be careful. Those people are dangerous."

Emily waved off his concern. "Don't worry. We can handle it."

But her confidence wavered when she noticed something. "Adam... you're bleeding."

He blinked. "Really?" He wiped under his nose and stared at the smear of red on his hand. "Wait, I'll go wash it off."

Adam headed to the restroom, heart racing. Inside, he leaned over the sink and splashed water on his face, scrubbing away the blood.

But then his vision warped, black liquid spun in his peripheral vision like ink in water. His balance wavered, and he gripped the sink to steady himself. His breaths came quick and shallow.

After a few agonizing moments, the dizziness passed.

He stared at himself in the mirror, beads of water clinging to his face. "What's wrong with me?" he whispered, his voice unsteady.

Steeling himself, Adam straightened and returned to Emily.

"You okay?" she asked, concern etched in her tone.

"Yeah, it was nothing. Just a nosebleed," Adam said, brushing it off with a reassuring smile.

Emily gave him a skeptical look but let it go.

"So," he said, leaning back in her chair, "I never got the chance to know more about you. Surely you weren't born a journalist?"

She laughed. "Yeah, I wasn't born a journalist. In high school, my mom was convinced I was destined to be a singer. She signed me up for all these vocal and music classes."

"But that wasn't your thing?" Adam asked.

"Exactly. I wanted to help people and have an adventure." She paused, her tone shifting to something darker. "And... I wanted to never see that man's face again."

Adam caught the bitterness in her voice but chose not to pry. Instead, he nodded, his tone gentle. "Sounds like you found your calling."

"Yeah... I guess I did."

"Families can be complicated," Adam said, his voice softer. "Especially when one of the members isn't exactly... friendly."

"Yeah, I guess so," Emily replied, her tone tinged with thought. She glanced at him. "What about your father? Is he...?"

Adam's expression darkened. "He's gone," he said quietly. "He was a kind and wise old man. Died in a car accident when some guys high on drugs drove like maniacs and hit him."

Emily's eyes widened. "Oh, Adam... I'm so sorry."

"It's okay," he said, forcing a faint smile. "At least he left me some wisdom."

Their conversation lingered in the heavy air, both of them lost in their thoughts until Lizzy returned with their pies. She set the plates down with a warm smile. "Here you go, guys. Enjoy!"

"Thanks, Lizzy," Emily said.

They dug into their desserts. Adam took a bite and his eyes widened. "Wow. These are actually delicious."

"Told you," Emily said with a grin. "Lizzy's Diner is my favorite place. Best pies in Forest Hills."

They ate in companionable silence for a while, the tension from their previous conversation slowly melting away. The comforting atmosphere of the diner buzzed softly around them.

"So," Adam said between bites, "I guess you made the right choice by becoming a journalist?"

"Well yeah, I like exposing the truth, hold the powerful accountable." She twirled her fork thoughtfully. "Plus, I was always a bit nosy."

Adam laughed. "Really? Couldn't tell."

"Shut up," she said, laughing along.

They finished their pies, and Lizzy returned with the check. Adam quickly snatched it before Emily could reach for it.

"You're not paying," he said firmly.

"Adam, come on..."

"I insist," he said, pulling out cash from his wallet, despite the sinking feeling in his stomach as he parted with the money.

Emily sighed. "Alright, but next time, I'm paying."

"We'll see," Adam said with a playful grin.

They walked out of the diner together, the cool night air brushing against them. The street was quiet, lit by a few flickering lamps.

"Thanks for coming," Emily said. "I had a good time."

"Me too," Adam said. "And hey, be careful with that whole NexGen investigation."

"I will," she promised. "You be careful too... photographer or not."

They shared a lingering look before Emily waved and started walking toward her apartment.

Adam stood there for a moment, watching her disappear down the street. Then he turned and headed toward the alley, his web-shooters snug against his wrists.

The early morning sun bathed the city in golden light, but New York never rested. The Financial District buzzed with its usual chaos, car horns blaring, pedestrians weaving through crowded sidewalks, and the hum of construction echoing down the streets.

High above the commotion, Spider-Man swung between gleaming skyscrapers, the wind tugging at his suit. He perched on a ledge, setting up his camera on a makeshift tripod he'd webbed to a wall.

"Okay... these have to do," he muttered, scrolling through the shots he'd taken.

Suddenly, his spider sense flared sharp and urgent, like an invisible alarm blaring in his brain. His muscles tensed as he pocketed his phone. Instinct took over, guiding him toward the source.

The faint sound of screams reached his ears, growing louder as he approached.

Perched on the side of a building, he spotted the scene below, a bank under siege. Masked robbers brandished guns, corralling terrified civilians into a corner.

"Showtime," Spider-Man muttered, launching himself toward the bank.

He landed silently on the ceiling, crawling above the chaos. His shadow flickered across the walls as he crept to the corner.

"Knock, knock," he called out cheerfully.

One of the robbers spun around, startled. "Who's there?"

"Your friendly neighborhood Spider-Man," he quipped, webbing the man's face and yanking him backward.

The other five robbers snapped to attention, guns raised.

"Light him up!" one barked.

Bullets tore through the air as Spider-Man leaped from wall to wall, dodging in a blur of red and blue. The sharp crack of gunfire echoed through the hall.

He shot a web at a pistol, aiming to yank it away, but missed, the web sticking awkwardly to the robber's arm.

"Damn it," he muttered.

Seizing the moment, Spider-Man pulled himself forward with the web, fist raised. His punch connected squarely with the robber's jaw, sending him sprawling.

Without missing a beat, Spider-Man spotted an iron chair in the corner. He sprinted toward it, lifted it with ease, and spun it through the air like a discus. The chair collided with a robber wielding a double-barreled shotgun, knocking him flat.

The remaining three robbers hesitated, realizing their bullets were useless against a wall-crawler.

Desperate, they grabbed makeshift weapons—a machete, a stray bullet case, and a splintered table leg.

They charged him all at once.

Spider-Man ducked under the first wild swing of the table leg, then sprang up with an uppercut that sent the attacker crashing to the ground.

Before the machete-wielding robber could react, Spider-Man flipped over him and landed smoothly behind him. A swift kick to the back of the head dropped him.

The last robber, seeing his comrades incapacitated, bolted for the exit.

"Not so fast, buddy," Spider-Man called.

He shot a web at the fleeing man, yanking himself forward. In one swift motion, he tackled the robber to the ground and webbed his hands and feet to the floor.

Panting, Spider-Man surveyed the chaos. "I'm getting better at this," he said to himself, grinning beneath the mask.

His eyes darted around. "Okay, where did I put my phone?" He spotted it in the corner, still recording.

He jogged over and grabbed it. "And... that's a wrap," he muttered, stopping the recording.

Just as he was about to leave, the blaring sirens of police cars filled the street.

The doors flew open, and officers poured out, weapons drawn.

"Hands up! Kneel down!" one officer commanded.

Spider-Man blinked in disbelief. "What? I just stopped a bank robbery. I need tips, not threats."

"Hands up, now!"

"Alright, alright," he said, raising his hands slowly. "Don't shoot the guy who just saved your pension fund."

Then, in a sudden blur, he jumped high into the air and shot a web at a nearby building.

"Hey! Stop!"

The officers opened fire, but Spider-Man was already swinging away, their bullets missing by a mile.

As he soared above the city, he let out a breath. "Definitely not getting a thank-you card for that one."

"That was close," Adam muttered, landing on a rooftop with a heavy breath. His heart was still pounding from the chase.

At least he got some good pictures.

He grabbed the bag he'd stashed earlier, quickly changing into his casual clothes before making his way toward The New York Report.

The moment he stepped inside, a gruff voice called out.

"Malik! Over here!"

Adam turned to see Randolph Randy Rourke, his perpetually irritated, fast-talking boss, gesturing impatiently.

"Take these and give them to Jennifer," Rourke barked, shoving a stack of papers into Adam's hands.

Adam barely had time to respond before Rourke was already onto something else.

"Now go get those files from Anderson and bring 'em back here."

Adam clenched his jaw but obeyed.

After running the errands, he returned, ready to show the photos he risked his *life* to take.

"Sir, I have..."

"Malik, coffee. Now."

Adam hesitated. "Uh, sir, I'm a photographer, not..."

"Did I ask for a job description?" Rourke cut in, already moving on.

Adam sighed and went to get the coffee. He knew arguing wouldn't get him anywhere. He placed the cup on Rourke's desk and stood there silently.

Rourke finally looked up. "What are you still standing there for?"

Adam bit his tongue. "I have pictures and videos of the new hero."

Rourke's dismissive scowl twitched into something resembling interest. "Yeah? Show me."

Adam pulled out his phone, scrolling through the shots. "Here he is swinging through the city. And here, stopping a bank robbery."

Rourke's eyes widened. He grabbed the phone, watching the footage intensely.

"Not bad, Malik. Not bad at all."

Adam crossed his arms, waiting.

"Send 'em to my assistant," Rourke finally said, sliding a crisp five hundred dollar bill across the desk.

Adam took the money, exhaling in relief.

"Now get outta here. And bring me more next time," Rourke added, already looking at something else.

Adam left the office, shaking his head.

"Guess that went well," he muttered, tucking the cash into his pocket before heading toward the assistant's room.

The wind was sharp against Adam's face as he walked home, his hands shoved into the pockets of his jacket. The quiet streets felt different tonight, emptier, colder.

Then, a scream.

"Help! Please, someone, help!"

His head snapped toward the sound.

At the far end of a dimly lit abandoned junction, an old woman clutched her bag, her frail hands trembling as a mugger yanked it away.

Adam's body reacted before his mind did.

He darted into a nearby alley, stripping off his jacket and jeans, wearing his blue slacks, red hoodie and bandana. He tightened his web-shooters, exhaled, and ran toward the mugger.

"Hey!" he called out, his voice sharp in the cold air. "Why don't you pick on someone your own size?"

The mugger flinched and turned.

Then—he smirked.

Adam's chest tightened. Something was off.

Then his spider sense exploded.

The metallic clicks of weapons filled the air.

From the surrounding shadows, figures emerged.

They moved in perfect formation, heavily armored, faces hidden behind sleek black helmets, their weapons humming with deadly energy.

Not police. Not gangsters. Something worse.

One of them raised a hand, speaking through a voice modulator, cold and mechanical.

"Target acquired. Fire."

The first shot rang out.

Adam flipped back just in time.

A searing red projectile tore past Adam's shoulder, the heat licking against his skin.

It wasn't a bullet. It was something worse.

He reacted instantly, shooting a web at the nearest enemy's weapon, but the web slid off.

His chest tightened.

They came prepared.

Before he could move, the second shot hit his ribs.

A burning shockwave of pain erupted through his body. He staggered back, gasping.

No webs? Fine.

"Old-fashioned way, then."

He lunged forward, adrenaline drowning out the pain, and kicked the nearest soldier in the chest. The force sent the man skidding backward, but not down.

Before Adam could follow up, a metallic baton crackled with electricity, then slammed into his side.

His body convulsed.

Every muscle seized as a white, hot current tore through him.

He choked back a scream.

MOVE.

With a desperate twist, he ducked under the next attack and spun away, barely dodging a second electrified strike.

He kicked one enemy's knee, twisting it into a wrong way

His senses were blaring, his mind racing. ***Think. Think.***

He shot webs to both buildings beside him and yanked hard, building momentum.

Then, in one swift motion—he rushed forward, diving under an enemy's legs.

Before they could react, he burst out from behind them, and slammed his fist into the back of a soldier's neck.

The man dropped.

Two down.

But seven more to go.

A whirring sound filled the air.

Adam turned just in time to dodge a baton strike, only for a metal gauntlet to slam across his face.

His vision exploded into white noise.

Another blow, a gunstock smashed into his stomach.

His body folded inward, the breath ripped from his lungs.

Pain swallowed him whole.

Another soldier fired.

Adam twisted mid-air, barely dodging the shot. The projectile streaked past him, slamming into a rusted power transformer on the corner of the junction.

A sharp crackle filled the air as the transformer burst into violent sparks.

His eyes widened.

That's it.

Wasting no time, he fired a web at the smoking transformer, his muscles straining as he yanked with everything he had.

The metal groaned under the force.

Then, with a final desperate pull, it ripped free.

He hurled it toward them.

The transformer collided with the nearest soldier, sending a burst of electricity arcing across their armor.

Then, BOOM.

The explosion erupted in a violent mix of fire and crackling voltage, engulfing the squad in a blinding flash.

Adam didn't wait to see the aftermath.

With a final, gasping breath, he shot a web and flung himself into the air, swinging away with every ounce of strength left in him.

His body ached. His vision blurred. His suit was shredded.

But he was alive. For now.

Adam swung as fast as he could, but every movement sent fresh pain lancing through his body. His suit, if it could even be called that anymore, was torn to shreds, barely hanging onto him. His wounds stung with every gust of wind. His body ached, his breath came in ragged gasps, and even his enhanced healing wasn't fast enough to mend the damage he'd taken.

He needed bandages. Disinfectant. Rest.

But there was only one place he could go.

He hated the idea, but he had no other choice.

With a desperate burst of strength, he veered toward Emily's apartment. He barely stuck the landing on the rooftop, staggering forward before catching himself on all fours. His limbs screamed in protest, but he forced himself to crawl down toward her window.

Reaching it, he knocked.

A second later, he saw movement inside, Emily was coming.

His mind panicked. Why was she so fast?

With the last of his energy, he swung aside, just out of sight.

Emily opened the window, looking around suspiciously.

Adam inhaled sharply. *Screw it.*

"Hey."

Emily froze.

Slowly, she turned back toward the window, her eyes locking onto him.

Adam tried to muster some cheerfulness, hiding the agony burning in his body. "You up for unexpected guests?"

Emily's eyes scanned him—really scanned him. His hoodie was torn to ribbons, his body was littered with cuts, burns, and bruises. His breath was uneven.

"What happened to you?" she asked, her voice sharper than usual.

Adam waved a hand dismissively. "I was fighting a giant dinosaur."

"Stop joking." Her tone was flat, unamused. "I'm serious."

He sighed. "Alright, alright. I was ambushed, some high-tech armored guys, probably NexGen's people. Either trying to kidnap or kill me."

Emily clenched her fists. "Damn it. I knew this would happen. We should've attacked first. If only I had more proof of what they're doing, I could stop them."

"We will," Adam assured her, though even he wasn't sure how. "First, though...

you mind helping me not bleed to death?"

Emily exhaled, shaking off her frustration. "Yeah, yeah. Of course."

She hurried off and returned with bandages, disinfectant, and a needle.

"Alright," she said, kneeling beside him. "Take off your hoodie and bandana."

Adam tensed. "What? I can't..."

"Take them off, Adam."

His heart skipped.

She didn't call him Spider-Man. She didn't hesitate.

She knew.

Adam swallowed hard. "What? No. I mean—how?"

Emily rolled her eyes. "Shut up and take them off. I'll explain after."

A teasing smile tugged at her lips, but her eyes held something warmer.

Adam hesitated a moment longer before reluctantly pulling off his torn hoodie and bandana.

His body was a mess. Bruises bloomed across his ribs, a laser burn scorched across his side, and dried blood clung to his skin.

Emily sucked in a sharp breath. "Oh my God, Adam..."

"That bad, huh?" he muttered.

She didn't answer at first. She just soaked a handkerchief in disinfectant and gently pressed it to the wound on his face.

Adam flinched.

"How long have you known?" he asked.

Emily smirked. "First? When you saved me from those idiots in the alley."

"That could've been anyone," Adam countered.

"Then, that video of you saving the old man from the bikers? The way you fought was exactly the same."

Adam pursed his lips. "Okay... that's fair."

"But the real giveaway?" She smirked, dipping the needle into the disinfectant. "Your ridiculous voice changing when you asked me to help infiltrate NexGen."

Adam groaned. "Yeah... that was kind of dumb."

"And finally," she continued, tightening the thread, "at the diner? I saw your web-shooters."

Adam blinked. Then his stomach dropped.

Oh. Crap.

"Did I seriously forget to take them off?"

"You did, Adam," she said, her smile soft, but amused.

Before he could respond, the needle pierced his skin.

"Ouch!"

"Sorry," Emily said, not looking sorry at all.

Adam glanced at his clothing, exhaling sharply. His outfit was ruined. Torn fabric, burned, shredded, and soaked in blood.

"Shit," he muttered. "My outfit's destroyed too."

Emily arched a brow. "Better. It looked bad on you."

He scoffed. "Really?"

"Yeah," she said, smirking. "Go get something that actually suits Spider-Man."

Adam let out a tired chuckle but said nothing. He just sat there, lost in

thought, his body occasionally twitching in pain.

A silence settled between them.

Then—

"Uh, can I, uh..."

"Yes," Emily cut in, not even looking at him. "You can stay here tonight."

Adam blinked. "Wait... how did you know I was gonna ask that?"

Emily threw her head back and laughed.

"Because you're predictable, Adam," she said, shaking her head. "Now shut up before you hurt yourself more."

Adam sighed, slumping back against the couch. "Yeah, yeah..."

Emily just kept laughing as she walked away, leaving him grumbling but secretly grateful.

The orange morning light spilled into the room, warming the space with a soft glow.

Adam stirred, his body immediately protesting as soon as he moved.

A deep, unexplainable ache burned through his muscles, stretching into his very bones. It wasn't just soreness from the fight.

This was something else.

His limbs felt heavy, his joints stiff, like his body was coming apart at the seams.

What the hell is this feeling?

He pushed himself up, groaning quietly as he tried to stretch. His movements were clumsy, sluggish, wrong.

Then, suddenly—

The bedroom door swung open.

Emily stepped in, her hair a tangled mess of curls, blinking at him, still half-asleep.

"Morning, Couch Goblin," she muttered.

Adam forced a smirk, trying to push past the pain.

"Morning, Landlord."

Emily paused, her drowsy expression shifting into something sharper as she gave him a longer look.

Her brows furrowed.

"You look like shit."

Adam quickly masked the pain, rolling his shoulders with forced ease.

"Gee, thanks. Nothing like a morning confidence boost."

She squinted at him. "You're moving weird."

He stretched his arms, biting back a grimace.

"Yeah, well, getting electrocuted and beaten half to death will do that to a guy."

Emily tilted her head, unconvinced, but didn't push further. Instead, she yawned, stretching her arms.

"Come on, breakfast," she said, already heading toward the kitchen. "You look like you're about to pass out."

Adam clicked on the TV before joining Emily at the table.

A news anchor's voice boomed through the screen.

"Breaking news! A cosplayer was seen swinging through the air and allegedly stopping a bank robbery. However, there is no proof yet whether he actually stopped the robbery... or was robbing the bank himself."

Adam paused mid-bite, staring at the screen in disbelief.

"Bullshit!" he protested. "I definitely stopped the robbery."

"Shhh! Let's hear it out," Emily said, nudging him.

The screen cut to a shaky phone recording of the bank teller being interviewed.

"He came out of nowhere. It happened so fast. He took down the robber before the police even arrived."

Emily raised an eyebrow. "You did that?"

Adam shrugged. "Well, yeah. They were some idiots."

She smirked. "Good job."

Adam took a slow bite of eggs, feeling a little smug.

"So..." Emily twirled her fork, eyeing him knowingly. "You are gonna buy a new suit, right?"

Adam smirked. "Nah, I was thinking about sticking to the battle-damaged homeless aesthetic."

Emily rolled her eyes. "If you're gonna swing around my city, at least do it with style."

"Style?" Adam scoffed. "You do realize I can't exactly order a superhero suit on Amazon, right? Unless I wanna rock a cheap Batman or Spider-Man onesie."

Emily popped a piece of sausage into her mouth. "So what's the plan then?"

Adam tossed the last piece of toast into his mouth and stood up. "Gonna hit a few shops. See what I can put together."

She pointed her fork at him. "No capes."

Adam threw up his hands. "Well, there goes that idea."

Emily snorted, shaking her head.

He made his way toward the door, but just before stepping out, he paused.

Turning back to Emily, he said, "By the way... thanks. For everything."

Emily met his gaze, her usual smirk replaced by something softer.

"Don't mention it," she said, a gentle smile tugging at her lips.

Adam nodded once, then stepped out.

The Battle of Mutants

Adam stepped into a fabric shop, his eyes scanning the shelves for the materials he needed. He had spent the night researching, learning that spandex provided flexibility and durability, essential for the kind of movements he needed.

He picked out red and blue spandex, the colors bold but not overly flashy. For added protection, he grabbed small sheets of Kevlar, not enough to make him bulletproof, but enough to reinforce key areas and absorb some impact.

After paying for the materials, along with a basic hand-sewing kit, he headed home.

Sitting behind his desk, he pulled up various Spider-Man suit concept arts for

inspiration, following YouTube tutorials for sewing techniques.

He started with the torso, stitching together a red spandex base and adding blue along the sides. For extra protection, he carefully layered Kevlar over the chest and back.

For the trousers, he used red spandex for the lower thighs and blue for the rest, securing a Kevlar insert at the knees for reinforcement.

Moving on to the gloves and footwear, he stitched together red and blue spandex, ensuring they were snug but flexible.

Finally, he turned to the mask. Digging through his things, he found the old goggles he had taken from the lab. He stitched a red spandex mask, cut out eye holes, and secured the goggles over them for a sleek, functional design.

As a last touch, he reinforced the elbows with Kevlar, knowing they'd take plenty of impact.

When he was done, he sat back, staring at his creation. It wasn't perfect, but it was his.

The first real Spider-Man suit.

Now, it was time to upgrade his web-shooters.

Using spare parts, Adam crafted a second nozzle, one designed for shorter range but with greater impact force.

Once finished, he carefully installed the new nozzle alongside the original, integrating a small lever mechanism that allowed him to switch between them manually.

A simple flick of his wrist, and he could alternate between precision webbing and impact shots on the fly.

Adam pulled his new suit snugly over his body, the fabric stretching perfectly to his form. It felt right.

With a grin, he leapt out of his window, firing a web.

As he swung between skyscrapers, the city rushing past him, he let out a triumphant yell.

"This outfit fits so damn good!"

Twisting mid-air, he caught his reflection in a distant glass building.

"Damn, I bet Emily's gonna fall in love with me when she sees how handsome I look in this."

He chuckled, flipping onto a metal beam overlooking an alley. His eyes locked onto a dumpster below.

Perfect target.

Reaching for his web-shooter, he flicked the small lever, switching to impact mode.

With a sharp thwip, a dense web shot out, slamming into the dumpster.

The heavy metal lurched backward, crashing against the wall with a deep metallic groan.

Adam threw his fists in the air. "Hell yeah!"

But just as he crouched, ready to launch himself into another swing—

His breath caught.

A deep, suffocating fatigue crashed over him. His vision darkened at the edges, his limbs turning leaden.

For a moment, he thought he was falling.

Then, as suddenly as it came, the feeling passed.

His hands clenched into fists. No. No time for this.

I need to figure out who's hunting me before NexGen makes their next move.

With a final deep breath, he leapt forward, webbing toward the heart of the city.

Adam landed silently on the rooftop of the main lab headquarters.

This was where it all connected, where NexGen controlled every major biotech facility in the city.

Same plan as before.

He crawled into the ventilation system, weaving his way through the labyrinth of ducts. Below him, bright, sterile labs stretched in every direction, researchers moving like clockwork beneath the flickering white lights.

He passed room after room, scanning, listening.

But the further he went, the heavier his doubts became.

Maybe I should've made a plan.

Then—

A sharp metallic hiss.

The vent beneath him snapped open.

Before he could react, he plummeted.

His instincts kicked in, and he twisted mid-air, absorbing the impact with both legs, arms up in a defensive stance.

He was in a massive, arena-like room.

The air felt too still.

Then—

Clapping. Slow. Methodical.

A figure emerged from the shadows, his silhouette stretching under the dim fluorescent light.

A man in a white lab coat, his smile sharp, calculated.

"Well, well... look who we have here."

His voice dripped with amusement.

"Spider-Man."

Adam kept his stance firm, eyes darting around the massive arena-like room.

"Uh... I might be at a disadvantage here."

The man in the lab coat took a slow step forward, his polished shoes echoing in the silence.

"I am Dr. Conrad," he said, his voice smooth, deliberate. "Lead scientist of Project Arachne."

Adam cocked his head. "Cool. Never heard of it."

Conrad's smile widened. "Oh, but you have. You're living proof of it."

His gaze darkened with something borderline obsessive.

"You are my creation. My product. My success. My dream."

Adam let out a low whistle. "Damn. And here I thought my parents had high expectations."

Conrad chuckled, but there was no warmth in it.

"You have no idea what you are, do you?"

Adam folded his arms, feigning ease. "Enlighten me, Doc. 'Cause right now, all I know is that you kidnapped me, gave me a dramatic introduction, and, if I had to guess, you're about to unleash something horrible on me."

Conrad's grin sharpened. "Oh, you catch on quickly."

Conrad took another slow step forward, hands clasped behind his back.

"You see, the spider that bit you was my greatest achievement. Years of research, genetic modifications... all designed to help sick people recover."

Adam scoffed. "That's actually pretty noble."

Conrad's smile didn't falter. "And to create super-soldiers for high-paying clients."

Adam's head tilted. "Ah. Yeah, see, that part? Less noble."

Conrad continued, unbothered. "Unfortunately, the spider died after it bit you. A complete genetic collapse. But no worries, because you, Spider-Man, are the key. I finally have you, and I plan to run a great many tests."

Adam threw up his hands. "Yeah, I'm gonna have to decline your very generous, totally terrifying offer."

Conrad's smile darkened. "It wasn't an offer."

He turned toward a massive reinforced door at the far end of the room.

"Unleash the Project Scorpion." he called out.

A deep, mechanical rumbling filled the air as the door slowly slid open.

Adam's spider-sense exploded in his head, a sharp, unbearable warning.

"Ohhh yeah, this is bad."

Conrad glanced back at him, his expression cold and clinical. "Good luck, Spider-Man."

Then, he turned and walked away.

Adam took a step forward. "Wait...!"

But before he could move, a deep, guttural snarl echoed from the shadows beyond the door.

Then, from the darkness, a massive figure emerged.

A sharp, burning ache tore through Adam's body just as he steadied his stance.

Not now.

He gritted his teeth, a groan slipping through clenched jaws.

That moment of weakness was all it took.

The Scorpion lunged.

A monstrous figure, towering and grotesque, rushed forward with terrifying speed. Its black, shell-like exoskeleton gleamed under the lights, thick and armored. A massive, segmented tail curled above its back, twitching with deadly precision.

The only human thing left... was its face.

Adam barely twisted out of the way, slipping to the side just in time. But his movements felt... off. Sluggish. Weak.

He wasn't at full strength.

The Scorpion hissed, then jumped, its massive tail whipping downward like a spear.

Adam launched a web to the far wall, yanking himself out of danger. He flipped mid-air, twisting toward his opponent.

As the Scorpion rushed him again, Adam fired his webbing, aiming for its legs.

The sticky strands coiled around its limbs, yanking them together.

With a heavy crash, the Scorpion collapsed onto the floor.

Adam didn't hesitate.

He fired more webs, pinning its arms and head to the ground.

But—

The creature snarled.

With a sickening tear, the Scorpion ripped through the webbing like it was nothing.

Before Adam could react, a clawed hand wrapped around his torso.

The grip tightened. Too strong and too fast. Adam swung a fist at its face. Nothing. Another punch. Still nothing.

A third. A fourth.

The Scorpion just smiled. Then, it hurled him.

Adam crashed into the wall, the impact rattling his bones.

He gasped, pain searing through his back.

The Scorpion slowly approached, tilting its head. It knew.

It could sense his weakness. It wasn't just attacking him. It was toying with him.

Adam forced himself up. He had to keep moving. He had to—

The tail struck. He dodged just in time, but—

A fist slammed into his ribs. Adam's body whipped backward, crashing across the floor.

His vision blurred. His breath came in short, painful bursts.

He was in serious trouble.

The Scorpion's claws clamped down on Spider-Man's body, locking him in place.

Above him, the massive stinger curled back like a loaded spear, its tip gleaming under the cold fluorescent lights.

Adam struggled against the grip, feeling the exoskeletal fingers crush against his ribs.

Think. Move. Now.

At the last second, he flicked the switch on his web-shooter.

With a sharp thwip, an impact web shot straight into Scorpion's face.

The force sent the creature stumbling backward, his grip loosening just enough.

Adam didn't waste the chance.

With his free hand, he fired another web—latching onto the tail.

Then, a second shot.

The web yanked the tail toward the wall, and with one more rapid shot, he plastered it in place.

The Scorpion thrashed, struggling against the sticky restraints. His balance wavered.

Now.

Adam switched his second web-shooter to impact mode—

And fired everything he had.

Thwip. Thwip. Thwip.

Heavy impact webs slammed into Scorpion's chest, arms, and legs, thick layers of webbing smothering him.

Adam kept firing relentlessly, drowning him under the weight of the reinforced webs.

The Scorpion snarled, tearing at the bindings—

But he was stuck. Pinned against the wall.

Adam didn't wait to see if it would hold. He spun, webbing toward the ventilation shaft he had dropped from. As he landed inside, he sprinted forward, his breath ragged. He wasn't sure how long those webs would keep that thing down.

He just knew, he needed to get the hell out. Adam escaped from the way he had entered.

He swung through the city, each arc feeling heavier, his grip weaker.

His breathing grew ragged, his muscles burning like fire.

Then, His fingers slipped. For a terrifying second, he was free-falling.

He barely caught himself on a fire escape, but his limbs felt like lead. His body was giving up on him.

He glanced ahead, his apartment was close.

Just a little further.

With the last of his strength, he hauled himself onto the rooftop above his building. His vision blurred, sweat dripping down his face.

His arms buckled beneath him.

Then, he collapsed. A long silence.

His pulse hammered in his ears.

With sheer willpower, he forced himself to move. Crawling.

Inch by inch, he dragged himself toward the window of his apartment, fingers gripping the edge.

Somehow, somehow, he pulled himself inside.

His hands fumbled weakly at his suit, peeling it off as he stumbled toward the door.

The clinic. He had to reach the clinic.

His legs barely held him upright. Each step was clumsy, unsteady, like walking through water.

His vision darkened at the edges. His body screamed for rest. But he kept moving.

Because if he stopped now, he might never get back up.

Adam stumbled through the clinic doors, his vision darkening.

Then, His legs gave out. The world tilted sideways, and everything went black.

A distant beeping. Muffled voices.

His eyelids felt heavy, but slowly, he forced them open. The blinding white of hospital lights made him wince.

A soft voice gasped beside him.

"Doctor! Doctor! He's awake!"

Adam blinked, trying to focus on the figure standing over him. A nurse.

Seconds later, a man in a white coat rushed in.

"Easy, son," the doctor said, grabbing a penlight and checking his pupils. "Follow the light."

Adam groaned, his throat dry. "Doc... where am I?"

"You're in the hospital," the doctor replied, pressing a stethoscope to Adam's chest. "Try to take a deep breath for me."

Adam did, but it felt tight, unnatural. "What... what happened to me?"

The doctor glanced at the nurse, then back at Adam. "They found you collapsed outside the clinic. You were unconscious when they brought you in."

Adam's heart pounded. "But why? What's wrong with me?"

The doctor hesitated—just for a second. Then he sighed and set down his clipboard.

The doctor pulled up a chair, his expression calm but serious. "Adam," he began, his tone measured. "Your body is undergoing... an abnormal condition."

Adam shifted uneasily, feeling the weight behind those words. "What do you mean?"

The doctor exhaled, folding his hands together. "We ran several tests. Your bloodwork showed extremely rapid cell regeneration. Much faster than anything we've seen before."

Adam swallowed. "That sounds like a good thing."

The doctor hesitated. "It would be... if it were controlled."

Adam's stomach tightened.

The doctor continued. "Your cells aren't just healing injuries faster. They're replicating uncontrollably—faster than your body can regulate. It's causing

severe strain on your system. This level of mutation is... aggressive."

Adam clenched his fists. "What are you saying, Doc?"

The doctor's gaze softened. "Adam... you have cancer."

Silence. A sharp, suffocating stillness settled over the room.

Adam felt everything slow down. His heartbeat, his breath, even his thoughts—all grinding to a halt.

His mouth was dry. "No... that's not..."

"I'm sorry," the doctor said gently. "We believe it's a direct result of your accelerated regeneration. Your cells are multiplying at an unstable rate, forming tumors while repairing other tissues."

I survived everything. The lab. The ambush. The fights.

And now I'm just... dying anyway?

"How long?" he finally asked, his voice hollow.

The doctor sighed deeply. "It's hard to say."

Adam let the words sink in. He felt numb.

The doctor leaned forward. "There are experimental treatments we can try, things to slow the progression. But we need to monitor you closely. You'll have to come in regularly for checkups."

Adam barely registered the words.

This wasn't supposed to happen.

Not like this.

The doctor placed a gentle hand on his shoulder. "I know this is a lot to take in. But you don't have to face this alone."

Alone. That word hit him harder than anything else. Because deep down, he already knew. He was alone in this.

And for the first time... he didn't know what to do.

Adam dragged himself to Emily's apartment door and knocked.

When she opened it, her eyes widened in shock.

"Adam... you look pale. Lifeless."

Concern etched into her expression, her gaze scanning his face. "What's going on?"

Adam forced a weak smile. "Spider flu."

Emily didn't laugh.

"May I come in?"

She stepped aside without a word, and Adam walked in stiffly, moving straight for the couch. His legs gave out the moment he reached it, and he collapsed into the cushions.

Emily closed the door behind her, then sat beside him, watching him carefully. "You joke again."

Her voice was softer now. But there was something else in it. Frustration. Sadness. "I sometimes wonder if life is just a big joke to you," she said, searching his face.

Adam didn't respond. His whole body felt tight, like a dam holding back a flood.

Emily let out a slow breath. "You laugh, you joke, you swing around, and you fight."

She paused, her voice shaking just slightly. "But when it comes to being here, as yourself, you disappear."

She swallowed, staring at the floor. "Even right now... sitting in front of me."

A heavy silence stretched between them.

Then, Her voice barely above a whisper. "You think life is just a joke"

Adam turned to her, his voice raw, a mix of anger, pain, sorrow, and exhaustion.

"A joke? You think life is just a joke to me?"

Emily's gaze didn't waver. "What else am I supposed to think?"

Her voice was firm, but there was something else underneath, hurt. "You wear a mask, not just over your face, but over everything. You hold everything in. Your pain, your past, your struggles. And when things get too real, you hide behind your jokes."

Adam's jaw tightened. "You don't get it." His voice was low, strained. "You can't get it."

Emily leaned closer. "Then help me get it."

Something inside him snapped. His composure shattered, his voice trembling—fury and anguish spilling out all at once. "Before all this, before the bite, I was nothing!"

His words hit the air like a hammer. "Just some refugee mopping floors in a lab, invisible to the world. No family. No friends."

He started pacing, his voice gaining momentum, breaking like a dam. "I could walk down the street and people wouldn't even see me. I felt like a damn vermin."

Emily stayed silent.

Adam's breathing was ragged now. "And then I got bitten."

He stopped, looking at her, his eyes burning. "Suddenly, I could climb walls. I could jump off buildings. Swing through the city. Stop bad guys. And you know what?"

He let out a sharp, bitter laugh. "I thought it would fix everything. That maybe, just maybe, this would finally mean something. That I would mean something."

His fists clenched at his sides. "But it didn't."

His voice cracked. "Now... I just feel a different kind of miserable."

Emily's lips parted slightly, as if to say something, but no words came out.

Then, Adam let out another soft, humorless laugh. "You wanna hear the best part?"

He looked at her, and for the first time, there was nothing guarded in his eyes. "The same power that makes me strong... is killing me now."

Adam's voice dropped to a whisper, raw and unguarded. "And in the end... I'm alone."

His fingers curled into fists. "And from the looks of it... I'll die alone."

Emily shook her head, her voice firm. "You're not alone, Adam."

He let out a hollow laugh. "I am. Because no one gets it."

Emily leaned forward, searching his eyes. "I know I don't get all of it. I know I can't fully understand. But I'm here. And I see you."

Adam opened his mouth, wanting to say something, but no words came.

A silence stretched between them, heavy, and fragile.

Emily hesitated for just a second. Then, slowly, she reached out, her fingers resting over his. "Let me care."

She leaned in, soft, uncertain. And then, their lips met.

Adam froze for a split second, caught between disbelief and something deeper. Then he melted into the kiss.

When they finally pulled apart, Emily rested her forehead against his, eyes closed, their breaths mingling.

For a moment, neither of them spoke.

Then, Emily leaned back slightly, her eyes searching his.

"What did you mean when you said you're dying?"

Adam inhaled sharply. "I have cancer."

A beat of silence.

Emily stared at him, frozen.

"What?" she whispered.

Her voice shook.

"No. That, that can't be true. You're Spider-Man."

Adam let out a bitter chuckle. "Yeah, well... turns out the whole 'super healing' thing comes with a catch. My cells regenerate too fast. They're mutating. It's killing me."

Emily's eyes widened, glistening. She wanted to speak, to say something, anything.

But no words came.

Then—

A sharp notification sound cut through the silence.

Emily pulled out her phone, unlocking it with shaky fingers.

Her expression turned to horror.

"Adam..."

She turned the screen toward him.

A live broadcast filled the screen, Scorpion, rampaging through the streets. Calling for Spider-Man.

Adam stared at the screen, his heart pounding.

Adam gripped the armrest of the couch, pushing himself up, his body still weak, but his resolve unshaken.

Emily watched him, her chest tightening. "Adam... you can't seriously be thinking..."

He cut her off, his voice low but firm.

"These people will die because of me."

Emily swallowed, but before she could respond, he took a slow, shaky breath.

"I have to save them."

"No, Adam, wait!"

She grabbed his arm, desperation in her grip.

"You're weak! He'll kill you!"

Adam turned to her, his gaze tired but unwavering.

"Either I sit here and die of cancer... or I go out there and die trying to save people."

A beat of silence.

Then, his voice softened, but only slightly.

"I'd rather take the second option."

Emily's throat tightened. She wanted to stop him, to argue, to beg—

But he was right.

And she knew it.

Adam reached for his suit, pulling it on piece by piece, masking his exhaustion behind quiet determination.

Just as he was about to leave, Emily's voice stopped him one last time.

"Be careful, Spider-Man."

Adam paused, turning back for just a second.

He gave a small nod.

Then, without another word, he jumped out the window—swinging straight toward the chaos.

Emily sat alone, gripping her phone tightly.

The footage from the lab played on her screen, frame by frame, until something caught her eye.

Dr. Conrad.

She muttered the name, her mind racing.

A quick internet search confirmed it.

Lead scientist at NexGen Bioworks.

Of course.

He's the one hunting Spider-Man.

Her fingers clenched. If she could get into NexGen's main office and steal the right documents, she could expose everything.

Without wasting another second, she grabbed her coat and rushed out the door.

Meanwhile, Spider-Man swung through the city, pushing his aching body forward.

His eyes locked onto the chaos below.

Scorpion.

The creature loomed in the middle of the street, terrorizing civilians, smashing cars aside like toys.

Adam flicked his web-shooter's switch mid-air, swapping to impact mode.

"Hey! Did you miss me?"

Scorpion's head snapped toward him, just in time for a thick impact web to slam into his face.

The monster stumbled back, snarling.

Adam was already moving.

He fired a precision web, yanking himself toward Scorpion, fist raised.

A punch to the face.

Then another.

His strength wasn't what it used to be. His body screamed in protest, but his mind pushed forward.

Scorpion tore through the webbing and lunged, swinging a massive clawed fist.

Adam ducked, just barely.

In one swift motion, he fired webbing onto Scorpion's arms, sticking them together.

Then, with a sharp spin in the air, he delivered a double-kick straight to Scorpion's chest.

The monster staggered. Then, Adam launched forward again.

Scorpion twisted his head with unnatural speed, whipping his tail toward him.

Adam's reflexes screamed. MOVE.

He barely slipped past mid-air, twisting his body.

And just as he landed, another punch, straight to Scorpion's face.

Emily stood in front of NexGen Bioworks' towering office building, steadying her breath.

She pulled her shoulders back, chin up.

Blend in. Act like you belong.

Without hesitation, she stepped inside, walking past security like any other employee.

The guards barely glanced at her. Good.

A few feet inside, her eyes flicked toward a building directory poster.

Dr. Conrad – 19th floor.

Restricted area.

Emily walked toward the elevators, slipping in with a group of employees.

As the doors slid shut, she pulled out her phone, staring at the screen without actually reading anything. Just another worker scrolling emails.

When the elevator reached the 19th floor, only she and another man stepped out.

She followed behind him, close enough to look natural but not enough to raise suspicion.

Two guards passed by. Emily faked a phone call, nodding like she was on an important conversation.

The man ahead suddenly veered off, heading to the restroom.

Emily hesitated, then ducked around a corner, waiting.

A moment later, she slipped into the restroom behind him.

The sound of running water masked her movements.

His work badge sat on the sink counter.

Perfect.

With one quick motion, she grabbed it and exited the restroom like she had never been there.

She moved fast but controlled, scanning the hallway.

Dr. Conrad's office was at the end of the corridor.

The door had an ID scanner lock.

She swiped the stolen badge.

A quiet beep.

The light turned green.

She pushed the door open and slipped inside.

The room was sterile, organized, too perfect.

Emily's eyes darted across the shelves, the desk, the filing cabinets.

There.

A stack of folders.

She flipped through them quickly, scanning the titles.

Project Arachne.

Her grip tightened.

"I need to find more."

She moved to the desk, powering on the computer.

A login screen flashed. Password protected.

Emily cursed under her breath. Damn it.

She glanced around the office, thinking fast.

She had gotten this far. She wasn't leaving without answers.

Emily's fingers flew across the keyboard.

She tried a password:

Conrad1975.

The screen blinked.

Then, Access granted.

She exhaled sharply, shaking her head. "Birthdate. Predictable for a full-time mad scientist."

She moved quickly, navigating through the computer's file explorer.

Then, footsteps.

Her body froze. Her breath caught in her throat.

Someone was walking toward the office. The sound grew louder.

Her heartbeat pounded in her ears. This is it. I'm caught.

She tensed, ready to grab something, to make an excuse, to run.

Then, The footsteps faded.

Whoever it was kept walking.

She let out a slow, shaking breath.

No time to waste.

She clicked through folders, until one caught her eye. Project Scorpion.

She clicked it open.

Inside, video footage, photos, text files.

Her stomach tightened.

She opened the first video.

A man strapped to a table. His body convulsing, screaming. Mechanical arms injecting him with something dark, something unnatural.

A second video. The same man, but now his body twisted, his skin blackened, armored.

His screams became guttural, inhuman.

Emily's fingers trembled.

They made him. Just to catch Spider-Man.

She swallowed hard, forcing herself to focus.

She plugged in her flash drive and dragged the entire folder over.

The progress bar crawled forward.

She glanced toward the door. Too slow. Finally, transfer complete. She ejected the drive, pocketed it, and powered down the computer.

Her hands shaking, she turned and slipped out the door, leaving no trace behind.

While Emily infiltrated NexGen's offices, Spider-Man was locked in a brutal fight with Scorpion.

The armored beast ripped a car off the street and hurled it straight at him.

Spider-Man dove to the side, barely dodging it, but his eyes snapped toward the civilians nearby.

The car was still flying straight toward them.

With a desperate shot, he webbed the car mid-air, yanking it just enough to change its trajectory.

It crashed down safely, skidding across the pavement.

But the strain burned through his muscles.

Too heavy. Too weak. His hands trembled.

That split-second struggle was all Scorpion needed.

The monster lunged, closing the distance in an instant.

Before Adam could react, a massive clawed fist smashed into his chest, launching him across the street.

His body slammed into the pavement, pain exploding through his ribs.

Adam groaned, pushing himself up, but Scorpion was already charging at him again.

Think fast. Move faster.

With the last-second instinct, Adam fired a web at the nearby street sign, yanking it free just in time, and with all the strength he had left, he swung it like a bat.

CRACK.

The metal sign slammed into Scorpion's face, sending the creature staggering backward with a guttural roar.

But it wasn't enough.

Scorpion snarled, gripping the same signpost, and with horrifying ease, he snapped it in half.

Then a full force swing.

The blunt steel struck Adam hard, sending him flying into a parked truck.

A gas container truck. Adam collapsed against it, gasping.

His whole body screamed in pain. His vision blurred.

Scorpion was already rushing at him again, claws raised for the final blow.

Adam's gaze darted behind him. The gas container.

A split-second decision.

He shot a web—yanking the valve open, releasing the gas. Then, with every last bit of strength he had, he fired a web to the nearest building and swung away.

Just in time.

Scorpion slammed into the truck, and in an instant, a massive explosion erupted behind him.

A deafening boom tore through the street, flames swallowing the entire area in an inferno.

Spider-Man swung through the air, the heat licking at his back, the shockwave sending him spiraling mid-air.

As he barely landed on a rooftop, he clutched his ribs, panting. His body was at its limit. But he wasn't done yet. Not yet.

Emily burst through the glass doors of the police station, her heart pounding, breath ragged from running.

She scanned the room, her eyes locking onto a uniformed officer behind the front desk.

Without hesitation, she rushed toward him.

"Officer, I need to report a crime. I know who's behind the Scorpion attack."

The officer's brows shot up.

"Wait, what? Who?"

"You need to take me to your captain. Now."

The officer hesitated for just a second, then nodded sharply.

"Follow me, miss."

Emily trailed behind him, moving fast as they weaved through the station.

They reached a door marked 'Captain's Office.'

The officer knocked once, then pushed it open.

"Captain Stan, this lady claims to know about the Scorpion attack."

The grizzled captain looked up from his paperwork, his expression unreadable.

He let out a slow breath. "Let her in, Private."

The officer stepped aside, and Emily slipped into the room, closing the door behind her.

The captain gestured to a chair.

"Take a seat. What do you have for me, miss?"

Emily didn't sit.

Instead, she stepped forward, reaching into her bag.

"Captain, I think you'll want to see this."

She pulled out a USB flash drive and a series of images on her phone.

She placed them on the desk, photos of malformed spiders, twisted experiments from the lab.

The captain's eyes narrowed.

His hand hovered over the flash drive.

"Alright... let's see what you got."

A New Beginning

Red and blue lights flashed against the sleek glass of the NexGen Bioworks headquarters.

A line of SWAT officers moved in formation, rifles raised as they breached the building.

"Go! Go! Go!"

Doors were kicked open. Shouts echoed through the halls.

Employees scrambled in confusion as officers flooded the restricted labs.

Dr. Conrad barely had time to react—his office door burst open, agents storming in.

"Dr. Conrad, you are under arrest for illegal genetic experimentation and conspiracy to endanger civilians."

His mouth twisted into a sneer of defiance.

"You have no idea what you're interrupting."

"Save it for the courts."

They slammed him against his desk, cuffing him.

Outside, the press swarmed. The era of NexGen was over.

The hospital room was quiet.

Adam sat on the edge of the bed, rolling his wrist absentmindedly, feeling... different.

Emily sat beside him, arms crossed.

The doctor adjusted his glasses, looking between them.

"Well, Mr. Malik..." He sighed, setting down Adam's medical file. "It appears your body has... adapted."

Adam frowned. "Adapted?"

The doctor leaned forward. "Your cells were mutating too fast, beyond what your system could handle. But something changed. Your body found a way to regulate it."

Emily exhaled, relief flooding her face. "So he's okay?"

The doctor nodded. "No more rapid cancerous growth. Your body have stabilized."

Adam blinked, processing.

"So... I'm not dying anymore?"

A small smile tugged at the doctor's lips. "Not anytime soon."

Emily punched his shoulder.

Adam winced. "Ow, okay, I'm still sore, woman!"

She rolled her eyes. "You're not dying. You can handle a little punch."

Adam chuckled, rubbing his arm.

For the first time in weeks, he felt something unexpected.

Hope.

The wind was cool and crisp as they sat on the edge of a skyscraper rooftop.

The city stretched below them, a sea of golden lights and restless movement.

Emily leaned back on her palms, looking up at the stars. "You ever gonna take a break?"

Adam grinned under his mask. "Me? Retire? I don't think the city would survive."

Emily scoffed. "You're such a dork."

She glanced at him, her eyes softening.

"But you're my dork."

Adam hesitated, then pulled his mask up just enough.

She smirked. "What, no joke this time?"

Instead of answering, he leaned in, and this time, he kissed her.

The city moved on below them.

But up here, for just a moment,
everything was still.

And Spider-Man swung into the night, not as a man escaping death, but as one finally choosing to live.

This was it. This was the moment. Not when he first climbed walls. Not when he first swung between buildings. Not even when he put on the mask.

This, this was where Spider-Man was truly born. Not for fame. Not for money. Not to be seen.

But because it was right. Because if he didn't do it, who would?

And as he disappeared into the city's glow, the night carried a single truth.

Spider-Man wasn't just surviving anymore. He was living.